Davide Bianchi

A SHRINE TO MOSES

A reappraisal of the Mount Nebo Monastic Complex between Byzantium and Islam

AUSTRIAN
ACADEMY
OF SCIENCES
PRESS

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"…from the door of that church we saw the place where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea… The greatest part of Palestine, which is the land of promise, was seen from there, as well as the whole land of Jordan, at least as much as could be seen with the eyes."

(It. Eg. 12, 4. Trans. by A. McGowan 2018, 125–126)

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PREFACE

The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo preserves the memory of the place where Moses was offered the vision of the Promised Land and where he died in the hands of God. It is one of the most important Holy Places in Jordan and the Custody of the Holy Land has the task of preserving and protecting this archaeological site for future generations.

The relationship between the Franciscan Friars of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem and the Memorial of Moses has roots far back in time. Fr. Sylvester Saller's excavations of the basilica and monastery (1933–1937) have been seminal and led to the first thorough archaeological investigation of the place.

After him, research continued under the direction of Fr. Virgilio Corbo (1963–1967) and Fr. Michele Piccirillo (1976–2008). The latter discovered in 1976 the most beautiful, large and intact mosaic of Jordan, which bears a marvellous hunting scene and two Greek inscriptions full of many historical details. He then turned his attention to the monastery surrounding the basilica and the many hermitages down the valleys.

Throughout the years the original shelter had been systematically improved as a result of a desire to present a dignified appearance for the Sanctuary of Moses, as well as an adequate environment for the cultural and artistic treasures preserved inside it. However, the proved geological instability of the mountain top led to the decision to replace the old shelter with a new one. Several architectural studios were contacted to present their ideas for the new Memorial and the project prepared by Arch. Roberto Sabelli was finally chosen.

In 2012, after a first phase of restoration directed by Fr. Carmelo Pappalardo, I was appointed to oversee the archaeological investigations.

In these last archaeological seasons (from July 2012 to September 2014), Dr. Davide Bianchi has been directly involved as my field assistant showing a great ability to adapt to new realities, and considerable leadership skills that have allowed him to run with exceptional disposition the topic of his doctoral dissertation, which he successfully defended at the University of Milan. After some presentations given in different venues, with this new monograph Davide Bianchi is able to offer a larger and more complete description of his personal research which not only involves the monastic complex of Mount Nebo, but also extends to include the other Jordanian monasteries linked to the devotion of the Biblical figures.

The first two chapters of this book are dedicated to the excavations inside the basilica and in one of the monastery rooms. Of great interest is the discovery of an unpublished burial in the nave of the church. The archaeological investigation of the tomb, its framing in the broader archaeological and architectural context of the church as well as the literary testimony allowed Davide Bianchi to understand its typology and function.

The careful re-examination of the results of the previous excavations combined with the new excavation data have also allowed him to define a clearer and more logical architectural development of the Basilica of the Memorial of Moses. In addition to the accurate graphic documentation of the excavated areas, the author provides useful 3D reconstructions of the architectural phases of the basilica, which thanks to their bright colours facilitate the reader's understanding.

For the first time in a thorough manner, the study of the Memorial of Moses also addresses the economic and social aspects of the monastic community that inhabited the Nebo Region. With the application of current approaches in landscape archaeology, the author focuses on the study of land use and its cultivation as well as on the water resources of the monastic complex.

Particular attention is paid to the social component of the monks and to the forms of secular and religious patronage towards the sanctuary of Moses.

It is also worth mentioning the publication of the pottery assemblages found in the cistern under the atrium of the church and in the last occupation phases of the *synthronon* as well as in the southern wing of the monastery. These data are included in the last chapter, in which Davide Bianchi provides a new and critical view of the continuity and decline of monastic life in Jordan during the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphate through the study of pottery, architecture and information derived from ancient sources.

This monograph, delving into religious, human and material culture studies, greatly enriches the knowledge of some of the more crucial centuries in the history of the ancient provinces of *Arabia* and *Palaestina*.

We applaud his efforts carried on with wisdom and intelligence in such a difficult field.

Jerusalem, February 2021 Fr. Eugenio Alliata

GELEITWORT

Die Memorialkirche für Moses auf dem Berg Nebo in Jordanien steht zusammen mit dem umliegenden Klosterkomplex seit vielen Jahrzehnten im Zentrum wissenschaftlichen Interesses mehrerer Forscher/innengenerationen. Auf die ersten Studien der 1930er Jahre folgten Untersuchungen in den 1960ern, auf die schließlich die über 30 Jahre andauernden Forschungen von Fr. Michele Piccirillo folgen sollten. Mit den Studien von Davide Bianchi, die zwischen 2012 und 2014 auch letzte archäologische Untersuchungen vor Ort beinhalteten, wurden bzw. werden die Studien nunmehr einem erfolgreichen Ende zugeführt.

Die vorliegende umfassende Publikation stellt die leicht überarbeitete und für den Druck adaptierte Version der Doktorarbeit dar, mit der D. Bianchi 2017 an der Universität Mailand promoviert wurde. Erklärte Forschungsziele seiner Studien waren zum einen die Neubewertung des Denkmalbestandes – im Besonderen der Memorialkirche für Moses – samt früherer Interpretationen und zum anderen die kontextuelle Auswertung sowie Analyse des Klosterbereiches. Hierfür konnte der Autor jeweils auf die neuesten Ergebnisse der von ihm durchgeführten Grabungen zurückgreifen. In überzeugender Weise gelingt es D. Bianchi aufgrund des neuen Fundmaterials nicht nur die Nutzungsdauer des Klosters, sondern auch die chronologische Bauabfolge der Memorialkirche näher zu bestimmen, wobei die wichtigsten Bauphasen auch in dreidimensionalen Ansichten plastisch veranschaulicht werden.

Von besonderem kultur- und religionsgeschichtlichem Interesse ist zudem der zweite Teil der Arbeit, in dem der Autor die Befunde auf dem Mount Nebo in einen größeren topographischen Rahmen stellt und aufgrund archäologischer Daten und literarischer Quellen direkte Vergleiche mit Klosteranlagen jenseits des Jordans zieht, die mit anderen biblischen Personen in Verbindung stehen. Zudem folgen wegweisende Überlegungen zu wirtschaftlichen Aspekten und zum täglichen Leben in der Klosteranlage.

Mit vorliegender Arbeit legt D. Bianchi ein für die internationale scientific community höchst wertvolle Studie vor, die zweifellos zu einem Referenzwerk bei der Bewertung monastischer Anlagen in der gesamten Ökumene der spätantik-frühmittelalterlichen Zeit und für weiterführende themenrelevante Studien werden wird.

Abschließend sei dem Autor zu dieser überzeugenden Studie nochmals gratuliert, deren Drucklegung nun in der Reihe ›Archäologische Forschungen‹ der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (ÖAW) erfolgt. Der Publikationskommission der ÖAW sei für die Aufnahme der Studie in das Verlagsprogramm sowie für die Durchführung der internationalen Begutachtung des Manuskripts gedankt. Zudem gebührt dem Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung (FWF) für die maßgebliche finanzielle Förderung der Drucklegung aufrichtiger Dank.

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Wien, im Februar 2021 Andreas Pülz

FOREWORD

The aims of the research

This book, based on the thesis for my Ph.D. conducted at the University of Milan, examines a peculiar aspect of monasticism which emerged in the territories of Jordan in Late Antiquity.

The research questions underlying this study were defined during the archaeological investigations at the Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo between 2012 and 2014. The excavations inside the Basilica and in some rooms of the monastery provided new outcomes on the architectural phases of the church and the development of the monastic complex between the Byzantine era and the Umayyad period. The lack of a unitary corpus dedicated to the monasteries linked to Biblical figures suggested I develop this topic. In doing so, I wanted to focus the research not only on the archaeological and architectural elements of the monasteries, but also on their religious, social and economic aspects. In particular, daily life in the monastery of Mount Nebo, its management, and devotional practices were taken into consideration. Moreover, the study of the Memorial of Moses was extended by means of comparison to the other monastic shrines beyond the River Jordan, also reflecting on the possible causes of the abandonment of these religious complexes.

The scientific purpose of the book is not a general discussion on monasticism, but a detailed analysis of these peculiar monasteries, which were characterized by shrines recalling specific Biblical episodes.

The goals of the research can be summarized in three major points:

1. Examination of the monastic complexes which were built in connection with Biblical memories
2. Investigation of the cultural and socio-economic aspects of monastic life in the monastery of Mount Nebo
3. Research on the processes and causes which had a possible impact on the abandonment of monasteries beyond the Jordan River.

Methodology

The methodology follows the criteria of a holistic approach. In the first part, special attention is paid to the archeological and architectural investigation in the church, some rooms and facilities of the Mount Nebo monastery. The archaeological materials (pottery, glass, metals) were examined analytically and graphically documented. To summarize visually the new interpretation of the architectural phases of the basilica, three-dimensional reconstructions were drawn and added by the author.

Literary sources, particularly the travelogue of Egeria, were also taken into account. For linguistic consistency with the text, the sources are cited in their critical English edition. Given their recurrence and importance in support of the text, the original passages of the Greek and Latin sources have been quoted in the footnotes.

Considering the limited recurrence of Arabic names and terms, it was decided to transliterate them without diacritical marks.

The analysis of the four monastic shrines was based on the re-examination of the historical and hagiographic sources in their original languages concerning the monasteries, as well as the archaeological evidence.

The socio-economic analysis of the monastery of Mount Nebo was conducted using epigraphical and papyrological sources and considering the numismatic finds from the excavations.

Structure of the book

The monograph is divided into two parts for a total of five chapters and an introductory chapter devoted to anchoretic and coenobitic monasticism in the provinces of *Arabia* and *Palaestina*. The introduction addresses the history of the research conducted on the ecclesiastical foundations in the region including the dwelling patterns of the monks. A summary of the excavations at the Memorial of Moses and the occupation timeline of the place conclude the chapter.

The book is then divided into two thematic sections: the first is analytical and dedicated to the archaeological data of the monastery of Mount Nebo, whereas the second takes a diachronic approach to the aspects associated with the creation, development and the decline of the monastic shrines. In this way, moving from the latest data from the most recent excavation campaigns and a critical discussion on the various monasteries beyond the River Jordan, it was possible to define not only the material aspects of the Memorial of Moses, but also its religious and economical aspects for the local society.

The excavation surveys carried out in the basilica are described in Chapter One, while the excavations conducted in room no. 103 and in cistern no. 8 are presented in the second chapter. The analysis of the ceramic, numismatic and epigraphic finds, supplemented by a useful list of stratigraphic units, appears in the first two chapters for better internal thematic coherence. On the other hand, the plates of the drawings were placed at the end of the monograph to facilitate their consultation. Given the numerous excavation campaigns conducted in the basilica of Nebo, the references to literature are shown in the footnotes (in some cases summarizing briefly the information already published) to emphasize the new discoveries and original interpretations by the author and make the text precise and concise.

The first chapter focuses entirely on the archaeological research carried out in the basilica. After a brief historical introduction of the site, the results of the excavation are presented, specifying not only the stratigraphic contexts, but also the connections with the published data on the monastic rooms built around the church. Particular attention was paid to the study of the pottery from the excavation which allowed many typological parallels with other finds in the region. The results of the pottery studies, combined with the monetary analyses conducted by B. Callegher, have made it possible to frame the construction phases chronologically. Particular attention was paid to the study of the architectural elements of the privileged tomb due to its interesting elements of reuse (*spolia*) and their possible origins. Some marble fragments, found in the levels under the *synthronon*, have expanded the knowledge of the liturgical furnishings of the basilica of Nebo and enriched the onomastic repertoire of donors.

The second chapter focuses on the *coenobium* and shows the archaeological data from the latest excavations in room no. 103 and in cistern no. 8, which was built under the atrium of the basilica. The analysis of the pottery found in these structures provides new outcomes on the architectural development of the monastery in the last phases of its occupation.

The third chapter deals with the monastic shrines, reflecting on their origin and their diachronic evolution. The devotional and liturgical practices that characterize the *coenobia* and the wider practice of pilgrimage to Biblical places are taken into consideration, focusing on the sacred topography of the region. The four Biblical sanctuaries are framed historically and archeologically with the addition of a rich graphic and photographic documentation, in many cases produced by the author during the surveys in the area.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the aspects of daily life in the monastery of Mount Nebo. An examination of the epigraphic, iconographic and monumental data from the various monasteries in the Nebo valleys helped to outline the economic and social components related to the

monastic movement in this region. In particular, the chapter is devoted to agricultural production, the relationship between the Memorial of Moses and the hermitages, the acts of secular and religious euergetism and the coin finds.

The final issue concerns the changes affecting monasticism and more generally the local Christian community in the transition from the Byzantine era to the Umayyad and then Abbasid periods. The fifth chapter extends the discussion to the continuity and decline of all monastic complexes beyond the River Jordan, while some references to the entire corpus of church foundations in the province of *Arabia* have also been included. The monumental, epigraphic and papyrological data suggest that the cause of the abandonment of the monasteries cannot be attributed solely to the Persian invasion or to the transition to the new Islamic rule. Indeed, devotional practices and pilgrimages were in fact only marginally affected by these phenomena. The factors that contributed to the slow decline of monasticism are therefore highlighted in the chapter, analyzing both the external elements (political, cultural, social, economic) and those internal to the monastic communities.

Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude goes to a large group of people who gave me great support in carrying out this research. First of all, I would like to mention Prof. Fr. Eugenio Alliata, the director of the Archaeological Mission at Mount Nebo, who instilled in me the passion for Christian antiquities of Jordan, directed my studies and continues to encourage my scientific curiosity. I would like to thank him for involving me in the excavation of the Memorial of Moses as his assistant and granting me permission to publish the archaeological finds.
I also thank the collaborators of the excavation Mateusz Chorosiński and Franco Sciorilli and the Franciscan community of Mount Nebo who hosted me during my research. I am particularly grateful to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Giorgio Bejor and in a special way to Prof. Dr. Basema Hamarneh for her numerous suggestions and ideas that have enriched the development of this book. I thank Prof. Dr. Renate J. Pillinger and Dr. Andreas Pülz for the enthusiastic acceptance of this work and the support for its publication. A special thanks goes to Andrea Sulzgruber for her help in creating the layout of the images and to Joan Rundo for her English language assistance.

I cannot forget the many professors and experts with whom I discussed many points of this study and who were essential for a critical comparison on this topic. In order Prof. Dr. Alan Walmsley, Prof. Dr. Kristoffer Damgaard and Dr. Stephen McPhillips, who welcomed me during my research semester at the University of Copenhagen; Prof. Dr. Anne Michel of the Université Bordeaux Montaigne and Prof. Guido Vannini of the University of Florence; Prof. Dr. Joseph Patrich and Dr. Leah Di Segni of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Prof. Rosario Pierri, Prof. Fr. Giovanni C. Bottini and Prof. Fr. Massimo Pazzini of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum and Dr. Barbara A. Porter from the American Center of Oriental Research, who were all of indispensable help for my field research and all those who supported me in my research activities and trips to Jordan, Israel and Denmark.

I would like to thank for their moral encouragement during the writing of this book my parents Giorgio Bianchi and Annamaria Monti, as well as my grandmother Enrichetta Bianchi, Michael Navratil and Guendalina Rocchi. The last memory is dedicated to the late Prof. Dr. Gianfranco Fiaccadori, who was the first to believe in me and in the success of this research.

Vienna, February 2021 Davide Bianchi

INTRODUCTION

A first approach to monasticism beyond the River Jordan

Monasticism is still one of the most characteristic and intriguing aspects of Christian life, as it is a physical expression of the desire to renounce an ephemeral material and worldly existence to dedicate oneself solely to Christ. This spiritual quest was at the basis of the decision of the first monks (μοναχόι) to abandon their civil and social surroundings to withdraw to an isolated place, where they could dedicate themselves to ascetic practices to then enter the celestial life promised after death. The environment chosen by the monks for their anchoritic life (ἀναχώρησις) soon became the desert, a space that was both concrete and metaphorical, chosen as the ideal dwelling for both the body and the spirit[1]. From the first experiences in Egypt in the middle of the 4th cent. A.D., monasticism underwent rapid development throughout the Christian Orient, with a particular focus on the Palestinian context.

In the diocesan territories beyond the River Jordan, in the provinces of *Arabia* and *Palaestina*, monasticism imposed itself in the anchoretic and coenobitic forms from the second half of the 4th cent. A.D. (Fig. 1). Although they were characterized by two different life styles, these two models often shared the same geographical spaces and the same religious aims. However, the spread of the ascetic form seems to have been the oldest, because the aforementioned territories presented the geo-environmental features most suitable for a hermit's withdrawal from the world[2]. The monks chose, as ideal places of retreat, the numerous natural cavities which dotted the rocky formations of the Jordan Valley. Furthermore, the pilgrims' travelogues record the presence of ascetics near the city of *Livias*, in the peninsula of Lisan and in the valley of 'Uyun Musa[3]. These elements have motivated the recent topographical surveys, which, together with toponomastic investigations, have allowed the recognition of the numerous hermitages spread through Jordan[4].

Significant examples are reported in the area between the River Yarmuk and the Zarqua, including the hermitage of Deir er-Riyashi between the Wadi el-Wala-Heidan and the Wadi el-Mujeb Arnon[5], El-Hamme[6], the three rock cells in the Wadi el-Habis[7], the hermitage of Wadi el-Yabis and that in the Wadi Zagara[8]. Near Es-Salt, the installation of al-Mu'allaqah in the Wadi ash-Shuaib[9] must be recalled while in the region of Kerak numerous rock complexes are attested in the surroundings of Hammam 'Afra[10], in 'Ain el-Qattara (Wadi Zarqa Ma'in)[11] and in the Wadi Defali[12]. The peninsula of Lisan and Ghor el-Mezra' are dotted with numerous

[1] On the topic of the monastic landscape, the bibliography is vast; see in particular Chitty 1966; Mango 2008, 150–182; Patrich 1995; Marazzi 2015; 9–25; Patrich 2019.
[2] Desreumaux *et al.* 1978; Hirschfeld 1992; Hamarneh 2014, 361.
[3] Hamarneh 2014, 362.
[4] Hamarneh 2014, 362.
[5] Burckhardt 1822, 371; Gluek 1935, 36.
[6] Steuernagel 1925, 121; Saller – Bagatti 1949, 221.
[7] Steuernagel 1925, 121.
[8] Steuernagel 1925, 120.
[9] Villeneuve 2003.
[10] Politis 2001, 588.
[11] Piccirillo 1989a, 248–249; Piccirillo 1992, 6.
[12] Canova 1954, 19–22.

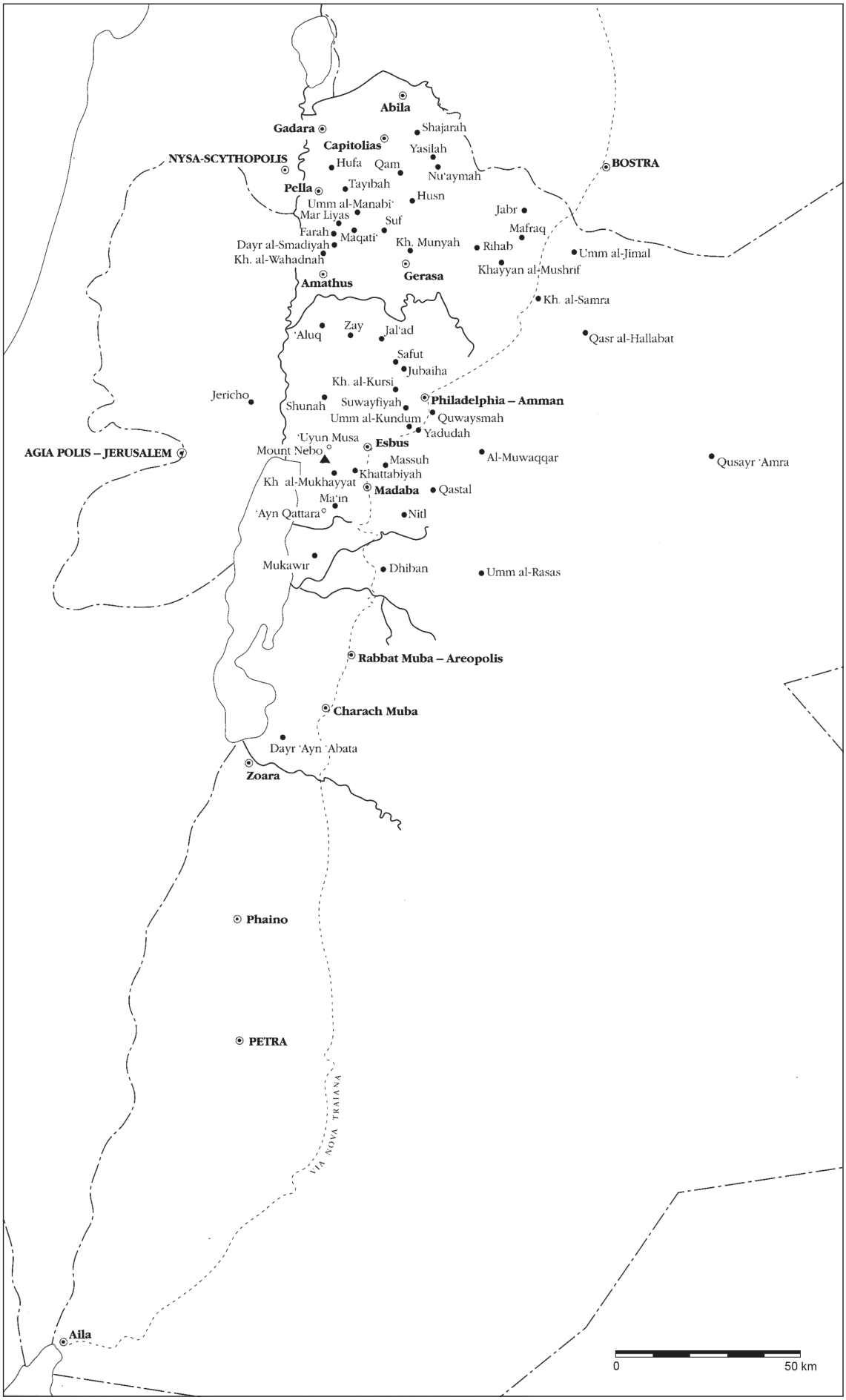

Fig. 1 Map with the main Byzantine sites of Jordan discussed in the text.

hermitic structures[13]; in particular near Deir al-Qattar al-Byzanti[14] and Qasr at-Tuba[15]. Lastly, more to the south, a rocky cavity in Sayl Batha in the Petra region[16] should be mentioned, as well as a hermit's cell in Kilwa, east of the city of Ayla-Aqaba[17].

The importance of the social role that monks played in the rural society of the provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia* has an important echo in literary sources. In particular, they show how the spread of monasticism beyond the River Jordan was originally to Christianize the rural population and the Arab tribes, both with a strong bond to previous pagan religious traditions. The historian Sozomen (A.D. 400–450), in his *Ecclesiastical History,* recalls a massive campaign of conversion to Christianity by the monks of the desert, who were the first to interact with the tribes from southern Arabia[18]. A century later, Cyril of Scythopolis (died A.D. 558) in his *Life of St Thomas* recalls how Christianizing the Arab nomads was accompanied by their subsequent sedentariness[19]. It is worth mentioning that the evangelization of the nomadic tribes, just as for the rural communities, certainly took place in the Aramaic and Arabic languages with the use of bilingual missionaries and monks (or even with the actual training of an indigenous bilingual clergy)[20]. These elements show the profound respect and the full veneration that the ancient tribal Arab society gave to the figure of the monk and the hermit. Evidences of that are the well-known legend of the meeting between the young Muhammad and the learned monk Bahira at Deir Nagra near Bosra (or near the site of Umm er-Rasas)[21] and Surah 57, v. 27 of the Quran[22]:

> *«We gave him [Jesus] the Gospel, and put compassion and mercy in the hearts of his followers. As for monasticism, they instituted it themselves (for we had not enjoined it on them), seeking thereby to please God»*[23]

Alongside the first hermitages, the monastic foundations were established, made up of a group of monks devoted to a community lifestyle, known as coenobites[24]. These monasteries took on very distinct forms and characteristics. They included both the small monasteries built in rural villages and the large coenobitic estates, which could administer lands, developed theological learning and managed the flow of pilgrims who often visited[25]. Very often, the monasteries effectively contained an ecclesiastical shrine linked to the figure of a particularly charismatic monk or hegumen or connected with the memory of a Biblical figure or event[26].

The extension of the monasteries could vary depending on the number of the monks, the needs of the community or the physical characteristics of the place where they were built. The division of the internal spaces was particularly heterogeneous, as in addition to the main building

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13 Canova 1954, 217–218. Nor should the reports provided in the life of St Stephen the Sabaite on the caverns chosen by monks for their Lenten retreat be forgotten. In particular, Arnoon, Giariba, Cutila, ar-Ruba, Castillion. See in this regard the study in Hamarneh 2014, 363.

14 Holmegren – Kalif 1997; Politis 2001, 586.

15 Holmegren – Kalif 1997, 333–335.

16 Linder 1997, 504, table 52.

17 Saller – Bagatti 1949, 230–232.

18 Soz. h. e. 6, 38. For the work of preaching Christianity in *Arabia Felix* and the relative journey of Theophilos the Indian, the study by Fiaccadori 1992b with a detailed bibliography is fundamental.

19 Cyr. S., V. Euthym, 10.

20 Fiaccadori 1992a, 98; Contini 1987, 60. On monasticism in Arabia in the time of the birth of the prophet Muhammed, see Millar 2009.

21 The monk Bahira is believed to have recognized the prophetic charisma of the boy. Griffith 1994; Fiaccadori 1992a, 102 with an extensive bibliography.

22 The Quranic text also dwells on Christian monastic life in Surahs 5, v. 82; 9, v. 34; 24, v. 36–37.

23 Quran, trans. by N. J. Dawood, 540.

24 This particular form of monasticism was founded in the region of Upper Egypt by the monk Pachomius the Great (died A.D. 346) and very soon rapidly spread throughout Palestine.

25 Hamarneh 2003, 195–209.

26 In some cases, the tombs of the monks of particular prestige were placed inside the churches of the monastic foundations and took on the typical connotation of the burial *ad sanctos*, this way becoming real destinations of pilgrimages. On the subject, see Hamarneh 2014, 365–366; Bianchi 2018.

for worship, there had to be a series of fundamental elements for the survival of the inhabitants: in particular, tanks to collect water and facilities for the preparation and preservation of food. External walls with towers also characterized some complexes[27].

Regarding the typology of the model of settlement in the area, monasteries of a limited extension are documented near ancient Roman *castra*, as shown by the cases of Khirbet Munya-Asfur[28], Qasr el-Bid[29], Deir el-Kahf[30], Jabal Qu'ais (el-Quttein)[31] and probably Qasr el-Hallabat[32] as well. In other cases, the monasteries stood in completely isolated spots; these include Zay el-Gharbi[33], Khirbet Munya[34], Khirbet el-Kursi[35], 'Ain Jammaleh[36]. The Persian writer Hamza al-Isfahani also recalls in his *Ta'rikh* that the sovereign ʿAmr ibn Jafna built several Christian monasteries[37]. Although not all the buildings have been recognized, the monuments and the inscriptions of the sites of Qasr el-Heir el-Gharbi, al-Burj, al-ʿUmayri and Nitl allow this view to be confirmed[38].

The development of the monasteries intensified from the second half of the 5th cent. with a peak in the 6th cent. A.D., coinciding with the great expansion of lay and religious building which had started during the reign of Justinian I[39]. The monastic institutions of the hermitic and coenobitic types continued to function actively in the subsequent centuries, until they were slowly and gradually abandoned, as will be discussed critically in Chapter Five.

A brief history of the studies and research connected with monasticism

It is not the aim here to present once again the analytical list of the numerous explorations carried out in the lands beyond the River Jordan, for which reference should be made to the well-known summaries in literature[40]. However, the most important archaeological missions, which have dealt specifically with the study of monasteries, should be recalled. This type of research had two different methodological criteria. At first, the investigations were limited to surveys of a topographical and epigraphic nature; subsequently the direct involvement of many research institutes allowed systematic excavations.

European travellers starting from the 19th cent. mentioned ruins of monasteries beyond the River Jordan in their reports. At that time, the desire did not yet exist to investigate specifically the individual ecclesiastical places in the region, moreover almost all unexplored, but instead a more general interest in the exploration of antiquities provided the impetus.

The oldest references to the monasteries in the region, in particular to the hermits' cells, are documented in the pioneering investigations by H. C. Butler[41], G. Schumacher[42] and later N. Glueck[43]. Although addressing the wider horizon of antiquities in Transjordan, these texts represent a useful repertoire for knowledge of the territory before modern building. Some

[27] Hamarneh 2012, 280.
[28] Piccirillo 1983b, 361.
[29] Piccirillo 1983a, 61; Michel 2001, 184.
[30] Piccirillo 1981, 62; Butler 1907, 148; King 1982, 94–95, Michel 2001, 243; Hamarneh 2012, 280.
[31] Qaqish 2007, 369; Hamarneh 2012, 280.
[32] Arce 2007, 342
[33] Piccirillo 1982, 359.
[34] Piccirillo 1983a, 361; Hamarneh 2003, 196–197.
[35] Glueck 1937–1935, 162; Hamarneh 2003, 197–200.
[36] Hamarneh 2003, 196.
[37] Hamza al-Isfahani, Ta'rikh, 117.
[38] Genequand 2015, 183.
[39] Di Segni 1999b, 140–178; Walmsley 2005, 516.
[40] Hamarneh 2003, 34–43; Bianchi 2007, 23–26.
[41] Butler 1907.
[42] Schumacher 1890; Schumacher 1900.
[43] Glueck 1934; Glueck 1935; Glueck 1951.

references are also contained in the synthesis by J. W. Crowfoot on the numerous churches of Palestine[44].

Amongst the first systematic surveys of the 20th cent., aimed at the specific study of Christian monuments, the surveys made in the 1930s by S. Saller and B. Bagatti in the region of Mount Nebo and in the diocese of Madaba[45] have to be mentioned. This research gave rise to a rich topographical *corpus* of Christian buildings, accompanied by an attentive study of the epigraphic material, which allowed the certain identification of the many monastic complexes in the Mount Nebo region. The same approach was followed by R. Canova in 1936 for investigation in the region of Karak[46]. The scholar recorded the Byzantine settlements in the area and made an in-depth epigraphic analysis of more than four hundred funerary steles.

The research by B. Bagatti and A. Augustinović in the northern areas near ʻAjlun followed shortly afterwards and allowed the recording of the ecclesiastical buildings in the rural areas and above all, the identification of the monastic complex dedicated to Elijah near the ancient Thisbe[47]. The study of northern Jordan was then resumed in the 1960s by S. Mittmann[48] and later in the 1980s by M. Piccirillo, who collected epigraphic and monumental data in an interesting publication completed with the results of the excavations he had directed in the site of Rihab[49]. In the same period, the Franciscan Archaeological Institute also turned its attention to the diocesan region of Madaba, coordinating a series of new archaeological investigations published in a volume edited by M. Piccirillo assisted by E. Alliata[50], which from certain points of view is still very topical. The two archaeologists continued in particular the systematic excavations in the Memorial of Moses, started by S. Saller and resumed by V. Corbo[51], extending the study to the numerous ecclesiastical complexes in the Mount Nebo region[52].

An analysis of monasticism which developed in the peninsula of Lisan is owed to R. Holmgren and A. Kaliff[53], active in particular in the site of Deir al-Qattar al-Byzanti and to K. Politis, who concentrated mainly on the site of Deir ʻAin ʻAbata and on the phenomena of asceticism and coenobitism in the southern region of the Dead Sea[54]. Further south, the archaeological activity of the University of Helsinki has to be mentioned which, directed by Z. T. Fiema, involved an international team in the systematic excavation of the monastic complex dedicated to Aaron on Jabal Haroun, the results of which have been collected in a recent publication[55].

Among the studies on sacred architecture in the Jordanian region, which also mention monasticism, the book by A. Michel has to be included, which synthesizes and collects the inventory of ecclesiastical building of the Byzantine and Umayyad eras in Jordan[56]. Indispensable for the study of the relationship between the Christian topography and the local Christian community is the research conducted by B. Hamarneh on the Jordanian rural context[57]. In the volume she edited, there is also a first critical reflection on the monasteries in the region, highlighting in particular their socio-economic role. The scholar's interest in the study of the monasteries is also

[44] Crowfoot 1941.
[45] Saller – Bagatti 1949.
[46] Canova 1954.
[47] Augustinović – Bagatti 1952.
[48] Mittmann 1970.
[49] Piccirillo 1981.
[50] Piccirillo 1989a.
[51] More specifically on the history of the studies on the Memorial of Moses, see below, 28–29.
[52] For a synthesis of monasticism in the region of Mount Nebo, see Piccirillo 1998b, 194–219 and 221–263.
[53] Holmgren – Kaliff 1997.
[54] On the studies on the complex of Deir ʻAin ʻAbata and on monasticism in the region of Ghor es-Safi, see the book by Politis 2012.
[55] Fiema *et al.* 2016.
[56] Michel 2001.
[57] Hamarneh 2003.

found in two recent articles for an annotated synthesis on monasticism of the coenobitic[58] and hermitic[59] type. B. MacDonald deals with the phenomenon of the pilgrimage to the Christian sanctuaries of Jordan in his travel guide[60].

Lastly, it is worth mentioning a series of studies linked to Palestinian monasticism, which, although they are concentrated on the monasteries of the Judean Desert, represent an essential instrument for the comparison with the monasteries of Jordan. In particular, the first annotated introduction on monasticism in Egypt and Palestine edited by D. Chitty[61] was followed by a wider work by J. Binns on both the hagiographic and the historical-social aspects[62]. The studies by Y. Hirschfeld[63] and J. Patrich[64] focus more specifically on archaeological aspects. M. McCormick resumed these data in his recent analysis of the monastic phenomenon based on the philological analysis of the Carolingian text *Commemoratorium de Casis Dei*[65].

The excavation campaigns in the Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo

Mount Nebo is on one of the western crests of the plain of the Balqa' region, known as the ancient Biblical plain of the land of Moab, which looks on to the north-eastern part of the Dead Sea in the present-day Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (Fig. 2). The westernmost spur looking towards the Jordan Valley is today called Siyagha, a name of ancient Aramaic origin, the meaning of which can be translated as "monastery, community of monks." This element allowed the first explorers to correctly identify the summit of Siyagha with the Biblical Phisga, the place where, according to the Biblical text, the prophet Moses could contemplate the Promised Land[66]. The first group of Christian monks who decided to link this topographical site with the important Biblical memory of Moses was certainly aware of the marvellous view from this location of the Holy City of Jerusalem.

During the 19th cent., the territories beyond the River Jordan attracted the attention of the first orientalists who, arriving from the Palestinian holy places, usually descended towards the shores of the Dead Sea to then climb up to the Moab plain. It was precisely the use of the toponym Jabal Nibu (جبل نيبو), still used today by the Bedouin tribes, that stimulated the curiosity of the first explorers and made them visit the ruins of the ancient monastic complex[67]. We owe the first documentation on the site to these scholars and specifically: the archaeologist F. de Saulcy for the first regional map of 1853[68], Le Duc de Luynes for the first photo and the sketch of the ruins in 1864[69] and H. B. Tristram (1864 and 1872) for a synthetic written report[70].

More detailed information on the archaeological aspects of the site come from the reports of 1873 by the archaeologist and naturalist J. A. Paine[71] and in 1876 by S. Merril[72] who both took part in the expedition organized by the newly-founded American Palestine Exploration Society based in New York City. This was followed by the research by C. R. Conder in

58 Hamarneh 2012.
59 Hamarneh 2014.
60 MacDonald 2010.
61 Chitty 1966.
62 Binns 1996.
63 Hirschfeld 1992.
64 Patrich 1995; for a recent summary on the distribution of monasteries in Byzantine Palestine, see Patrich 2019.
65 McCormick 2011.
66 Piccirillo 1998a, 13.
67 Piccirillo 1998a, 13.
68 de Saulcy 1853; de Saulcy 1865.
69 de Luynes 1874.
70 Tristram 1865; Tristram 1874.
71 Paine 1875.
72 Merril 1881.

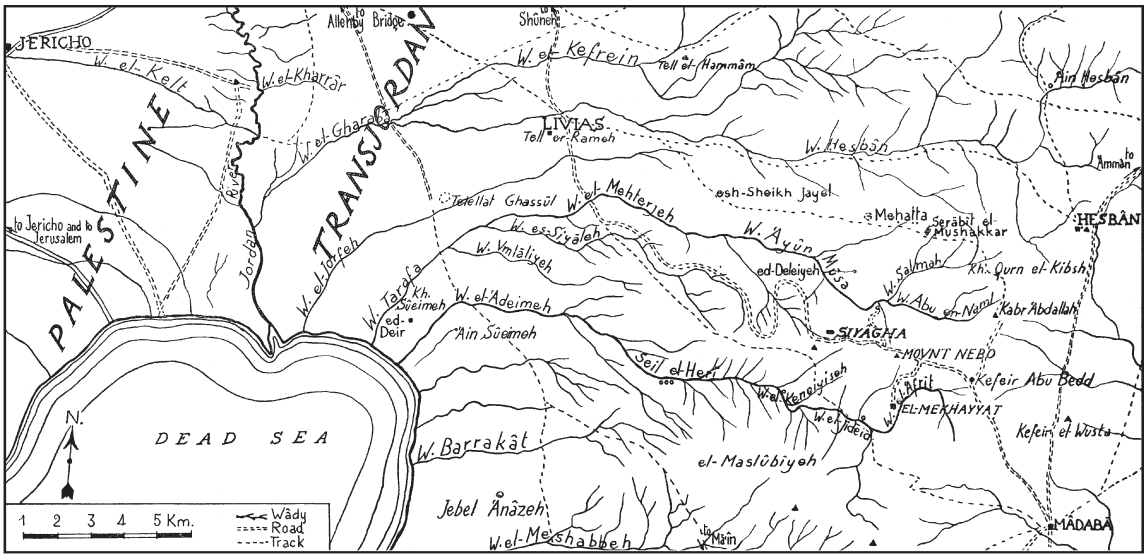

Fig. 2 Map with localization of the Memorial of Moses in the Nebo Region (after Saller 1941, Fig. 1)

1881, who made the first analytical survey east of the River Jordan[73] and the publications by G. Schumacher (1891)[74], A. Musil (1901)[75] and N. Glueck (1932)[76].

A turning point came in 1902 when the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land founded the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, a research institute for the study of theology and Biblical archaeology, in Jerusalem, and began the first archaeological campaigns at Mount Nebo. Following the example of the British and American archaeological centres, the Catholic Church also expressed the desire to accompany the study of the Scriptures with pioneering research in the field. The first surveys on Mount Nebo were possible thanks to the passion and the spirit of initiative of J. Mihaic, a Croatian friar[77].

In 1932, with the consent and the collaboration of the emir 'Abd Allah ibn al-Husayn, the Custody of the Holy Land purchased some properties on Mount Nebo which belonged to the Arab tribe of the Wukhyan in which the ruins of the archaeological sites of Ras Siyagha and Khirbet el-Mukhayyat were located[78]. The decision to purchase both places was very shrewd because it allowed the revelation that the Memorial of Moses was under the peak of Siyagha while the ancient town of Nebo was at Mukhayyat.

On 14th July 1933, the systematic investigation of the site started under the scientific direction of S. Saller, a young Franciscan archaeologist who belonged to the teaching staff of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum (Figs. 3–5). The expedition to Mount Nebo was the first excavation campaign in *stricto sensu*, and was a good school-site for the training of the first generation of archaeologists of the Studium, including B. Bagatti and H. Schneider.

At the end of the first campaigns (1933–1937), which involved dozens of local workers, a large monastic complex with an overall surface area of about 6640 square metres was brought to light. The attention of the excavators, although limited to the superficial layers, was first on the centre of the complex, in particular the basilica with three chapels, the narthex and the atrium surrounded by numerous rooms, and then extending to the surrounding area. However,

[73] Conder 1889.
[74] Schumacher 1893, 164–168.
[75] Musil 1907, 265–274; 334–348.
[76] Glueck 1934; Glueck 1935, 110–111.
[77] Piccirillo 1998a, 47–48.
[78] Piccirillo 1998a, 47–48.

Fig. 3 Memorial of Moses. The members of the first excavation campaign.

Fig. 4 Memorial of Moses. The excavations in the Basilica, 1933.

Fig. 5 Memorial of Moses. The monastic complex at the end of the first excavation campaign in 1937.

not all the areas were excavated, in particular the eastern wing and some hermitages facing the valley. Alongside the stratigraphic investigation in the site of Siyagha, B. Bagatti made a detailed territorial survey of Mount Nebo, which allowed the identification of other Christian buildings in the area.

The excavations were then resumed in 1963, when V. Corbo promoted the construction of a first roofing to protect the archaeological ruins of the basilica (Figs. 6–7)[79]. This structure was made of prefabricated concrete to be very resistant to the strong winds, which especially in the winter, blew around the top of the mountain. V. Corbo's research enabled the identification of some of the oldest levels of occupation of the monastery of Mount Nebo, but the Six Days' War, which broke out in 1967, precociously stopped the research because a fortified military base occupied Mount Nebo.

In 1973, M. Piccirillo took on responsibility for the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum for the antiquities in Jordan. Three years later, in 1976, the young archaeologist resumed the excavations started by V. Corbo in the basilica, concentrating in particular on the *diakonikon*[80]. When he had finished the investigations inside the church, the scholar turned his attention to the ruins on the slopes of the mountain and in the valleys. The territorial surveys allowed the identification and mapping of the natural cavities occupied by the ascetics.

Unfortunately, the geophysical instability of the place, the precocious deterioration of the covering of the basilica and above all the difficult heating insulation, which made it unsuitable for pilgrims to come to the church, made replacing the roofing compulsory. M. Piccirillo then appointed the architect R. Sabelli of the University of Florence to make a new structure that

[79] For the data relative to the investigations, see Corbo 1970.
[80] Piccirillo 1976.

Fig. 6 Memorial of Moses. Eastern wing of the monastery in the early 1990s.

Fig. 7 Memorial of Moses. Northern wing of the monastery in the early 1990s (© APAAME).

could preserve the ruins of the basilica. After the premature death of M. Piccirillo, in October 2008, the central administration of the Custody of the Holy Land subsequently took over the direction of the works and after a series of new archaeological investigations by C. Pappalardo, E. Alliata and the author, the Memorial of Moses could at last be reopened in October 2016 (Figs. 8–12).

Timeline of occupation of Mount Nebo

- 1,500,000 years B.C. – The oldest human presence in the area of Mount Nebo
- 3,000 years B.C. – Many megalithic stone-circles are erected in the valleys of Mount Nebo
- 13th cent. B.C. – Presumed date of the Exodus of the Israelites, their wandering in the desert and the death of the prophet Moses (Deuteronomy 34: 5)
- 8th cent. B.C. – King Mesha of Moab conquers the town of Nebo (Kh. el-Mukhayyat)
- 2nd cent. B.C. – Foundation of a Hasmonean settlement in Kh. el-Mukhayyat
- 2nd cent. A.D. – The Roman emperors group together these territories in the new province of *Arabia*
- 3rd–4th cent. A.D. – Some funerary inscriptions in the Samaritan language are made at the site of Siyagha
- 4th–5th cent. A.D. – Development of hermitic monasticism near ‘Uyun Musa. Written travelogues by pilgrims who visit the place. Building of the oldest church on the summit of Ras Siyagha, on the spot where, according to tradition, Moses died
- 6th cent. A.D. – Development of a large monastic complex around the basilica
- A.D. 530 – Building of the *diakonikon* – northern baptistery
- A.D. 597 – Building of the southern baptistery
- A.D. 604 ca. – Building of the chapel of the Virgin Mary (*Theotokos*)
- A.D. 638–642 – Muslim armies conquer the Levant
- A.D. 749 – An earthquake hits the Jordan Valley, including Mount Nebo
- 8th cent. A.D. – The apse of the church and part of the monastery are rebuilt
- 9th–10th cent. A.D. – The site is abandoned permanently
- 19th cent. – Topographic reconnaissances by Western explorers in the ruins of Mount Nebo
- 1932 – The Franciscans purchase the land of Ras Siyagha and Kh. el-Mukhayyat
- 1933–1937 – Archaeological investigations of the site directed by S. Saller
- 1964 – V. Corbo builds a first roofing for the protection of the archaeological site
- 1976 – M. Piccirillo brings to light the mosaic of the *diakonikon*-northern baptistery
- 2016 – Reopening of the ancient basilica and of the archaeological site after restoration

Fig. 8 Memorial of Moses. Eastern side of the Basilica after the restoration work. October 2016.

Fig. 9 Memorial of Moses. Western side of the Basilica after the restoration work. October 2016.

Fig. 10 Memorial of Moses. New display in the Basilica.

Fig. 11 Memorial of Moses. The mosaic floor in the Theotokos Chapel after the restoration work.

Fig. 12 Memorial of Moses. The excavating team (2012–2014).

PART I:
THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN THE MONASTIC COMPLEX OF MOUNT NEBO

1. EXCAVATION AND ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE BASILICA

The archaeological investigations presented in this chapter took place between July 2012 and September 2014 following the reconnaissance on the progress of works for the roofing of the Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo. On that occasion, a series of preventive surveys was decided, limited to the main body and the presbytery of the basilica, to be carried out in the areas which had not been excavated in the previous campaigns directed by the archaeologists S. Saller, V. Corbo and M. Piccirillo[81].

The reason for the decision was the unique opportunity to collect new data, useful for understanding the individual actions of construction, reconstruction, adaptation and restoration which marked the vicissitudes of the sacred building and of the monastic complex of Siyagha (Fig. 13). Indeed, the new archaeological outcomes have allowed the confutation of the previous interpretations regarding the genesis and development of the basilica.

Without going over the very well-known phases of the building of the basilica in detail, it is important for a better understanding of the building to briefly recall its structure[82] (Fig. 14). The church shows a layout of three naves with multiple lateral areas. At the end of the first quarter of the 4th cent. A.D., the demolition of some parts of the monastery on the northern side of the church allowed the construction of an ample rectangular hall with the function of baptistery, characterized by a baptismal font in masonry and paved with a fine mosaic dated to August A.D. 531[83]. The *diakonikon*-baptistery was placed at a level approximately 1.10 m lower and was linked with the naves of the basilica by a flight of steps[84]. A new baptistery, supported by the southern wall of the church, was built at a later phase, dated by the mosaic pavement to A.D. 597, in the time of the abbot Martyrius and the Bishop Sergius[85]. On the same time horizon, the old baptistery was therefore buried and, after the level of the floor was raised to that of the nave, it was reconverted into a new *diakonikon*[86]. The last significant addition to the ecclesiastical complex, a chapel dedicated to the Theotokos, in the area west of the southern baptistery, can be dated to between A.D. 604 and 609, under the episcopacy of Leontius of Madaba[87].

The archaeological contexts found in the latest excavations have confirmed the presence of significant traces of occupation in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. These last phases are considered of great interest, as they allow the settlement of the site to be traced from the first centuries of the Islamic age to its decline and abandonment during the 9th cent. A.D.[88].

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81 For the history of the site and the excavations, see the Introduction, 28–29.

82 The bibliography on the ecclesiastical complex of Mount Nebo is very extensive. Saller 1941 and Piccirillo – Alliata 1998 remain fundamental. For a synthesis, see Piccirillo 1989a, 147–175; Piccirillo 1993, 133–15; Piccirillo 2002, 81–113.

83 Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 168–171.

84 Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 168.

85 Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 176–177.

86 Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 176–177.

87 Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 178–179.

88 For a general discussion of the decline of monasticism, see Chapter 5.

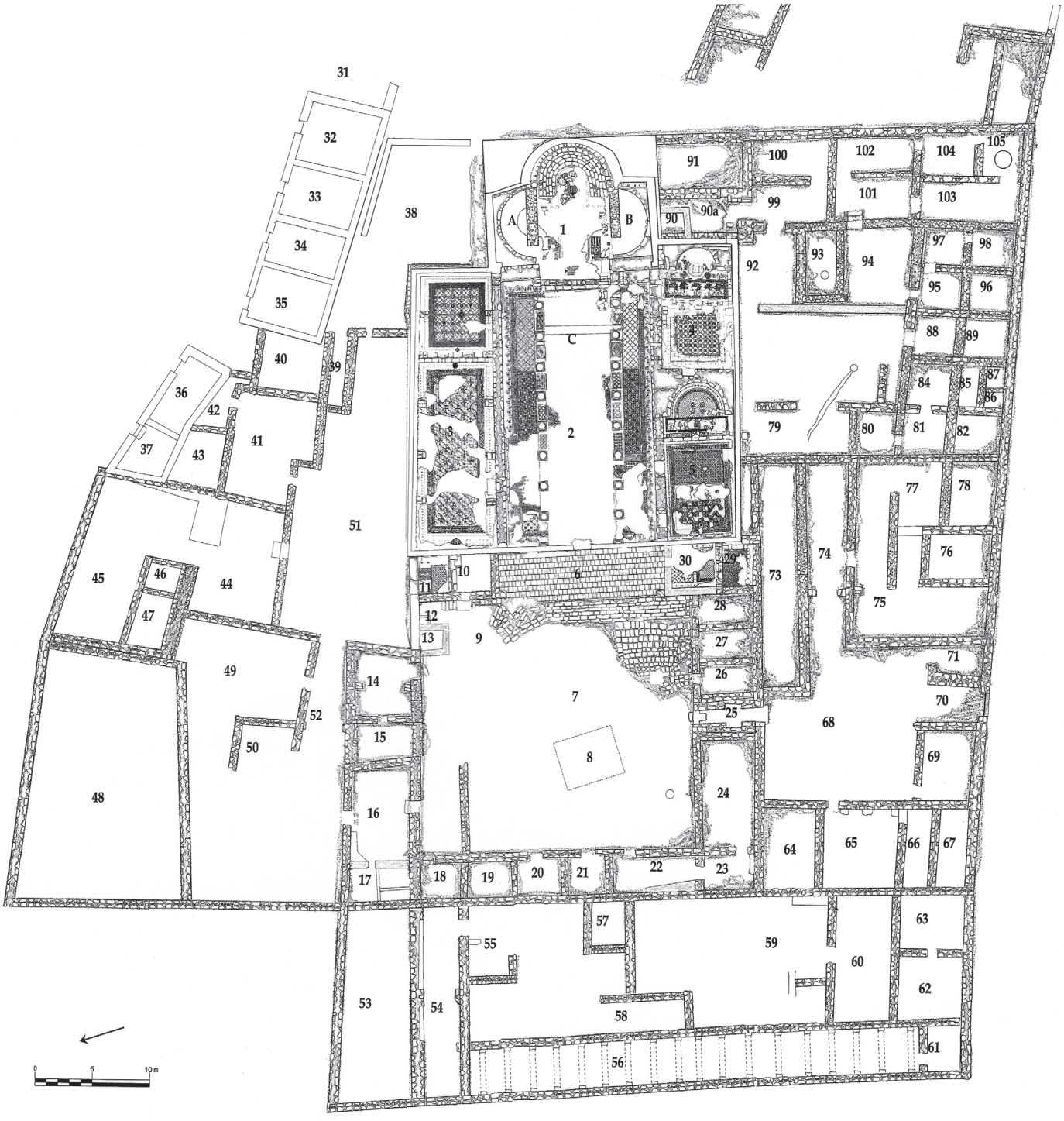

Fig. 13 Memorial of Moses. General plan of the site of Siyagha (drawing by G. Micalizzi and C. Puglisi).

1.1 THE EXCAVATION

The individual archaeological excavations were grouped into five distinct areas following a topographical criterion, from the *synthronon* to the west façade of the basilica (Fig. 15).

1.1.1 Area 1: survey under the *synthronon* and in the apse of the *cella trichora*

1.1.1.1 Demolition of the synthronon

The survey included the demolition of the northern half of the *synthronon*[89], consisting of five rows of steps made from *nary*[90] stones (Figs. 16–18). During the 1966 excavations, carried out by V. Corbo in the *cella trichora*, the survey was stopped in front of the *synthronon* so as not to compromise the stability of the architectonic structure[91] (Fig. 19). However, in the section under it, the archaeologist documented the presence of a black layer containing pottery sherds which he believed to be of Roman date. The potential of this material therefore provided an impetus for new research. Although no work in this area was known[92], after the two upper rows were removed, contemporary material was recovered in SU1 (some plastic fragments and two coins minted in the early 20th cent.[93]) which would allow the hypothesis that recent work of consolidation of the structure had been carried out, possibly under M. Piccirillo's direction. During the demolition it became clear that some upper blocks of the steps show evident traces of reuse[94].

The next row (SU2) was mostly made up of many irregular stones used as a preparation for the surface on which the upper steps of the *synthronon* rested (Fig. 20). Sieving this layer revealed an abundant amount of sherds traceable to different types of pottery, the production of which covers a wide time period. Fragments of the common type of tableware and painted pottery of the Umayyad period – dated between the end of the 7th and the first half of the 8th cent. A.D. – are attested, characterized by orange-pinkish slipware with reddish painting and others which are black with a pinkish fabric (Fig. 21). The layer included numerous fragments of Byzantine pottery with a fabric rich in granular inclusions with a light or blackish slip, decorated with cords in relief, attested between the first half of the 5th and the end of the 6th cent. A.D. (Pls. 1–2). The organic findings, including coals, plant seeds, animal bones and vertebrae with signs of slaughtering, provided useful evidence for defining the diet common in the region[95]. The inorganic materials include some pieces of vitreous paste and fragments of glass vessels, sherds of flint, iron nails, fragments of red, white and green plaster, mosaic tesserae of different sizes and colours (Figs. 22–25; Pl. 11; Pl. 12, nos.1, 3), damaged tiles (Pl. 14, nos.

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[89] The *synthronon* is the best preserved liturgical installation in the basilica of Mount Nebo. It is 80 m wide at the base, 1.27 m high and is based on a foundation 50 cm high. Probably only the last row was for the seating of the clergy and the central position was reserved for the celebrant or the hegumen of the monastery. The structure was originally faced with a coat of plaster, fragments of which were recovered during the excavation by S. Saller. See Saller 1941, 48–49 pl. 81; Michel 1998b, 402–403.

[90] *Nary* stone appears as a light and porous tuffaceous encrustation which is very resistant to fire. It is noteworthy that the monastic complex of Mount Nebo was wholly built with stone material, using limestone and cretaceous tuff of local origin. Territorial reconnaissance in the valleys of Mount Nebo has allowed the identification of numerous quarries in the vicinity of the monastery precisely to optimize finding the building material. For an analysis of the building material, see Marino 2004, 47–48; Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 185 no. 33.

[91] Corbo 1970, 273–281.

[92] The area does not appear to have been excavated by the archaeological campaigns of S. Saller or by those of V. Corbo; see Saller 1941, 23–44; Corbo 1970, 277.

[93] The coins are sub-units of five pfennig of the German Mark and one US dollar coin.

[94] Specifically: stone no. 31 showed signs of reworking; stone no. 15 was part of a door jamb and stone no. 16 showed typical working to be plastered.

[95] For further information on the dietary practices of the monks in the Byzantine age, see the discussion in Chapter 4, 178–183. For a more general overview on this subject, see Thomas *et al.* 2000, 1696–1716.

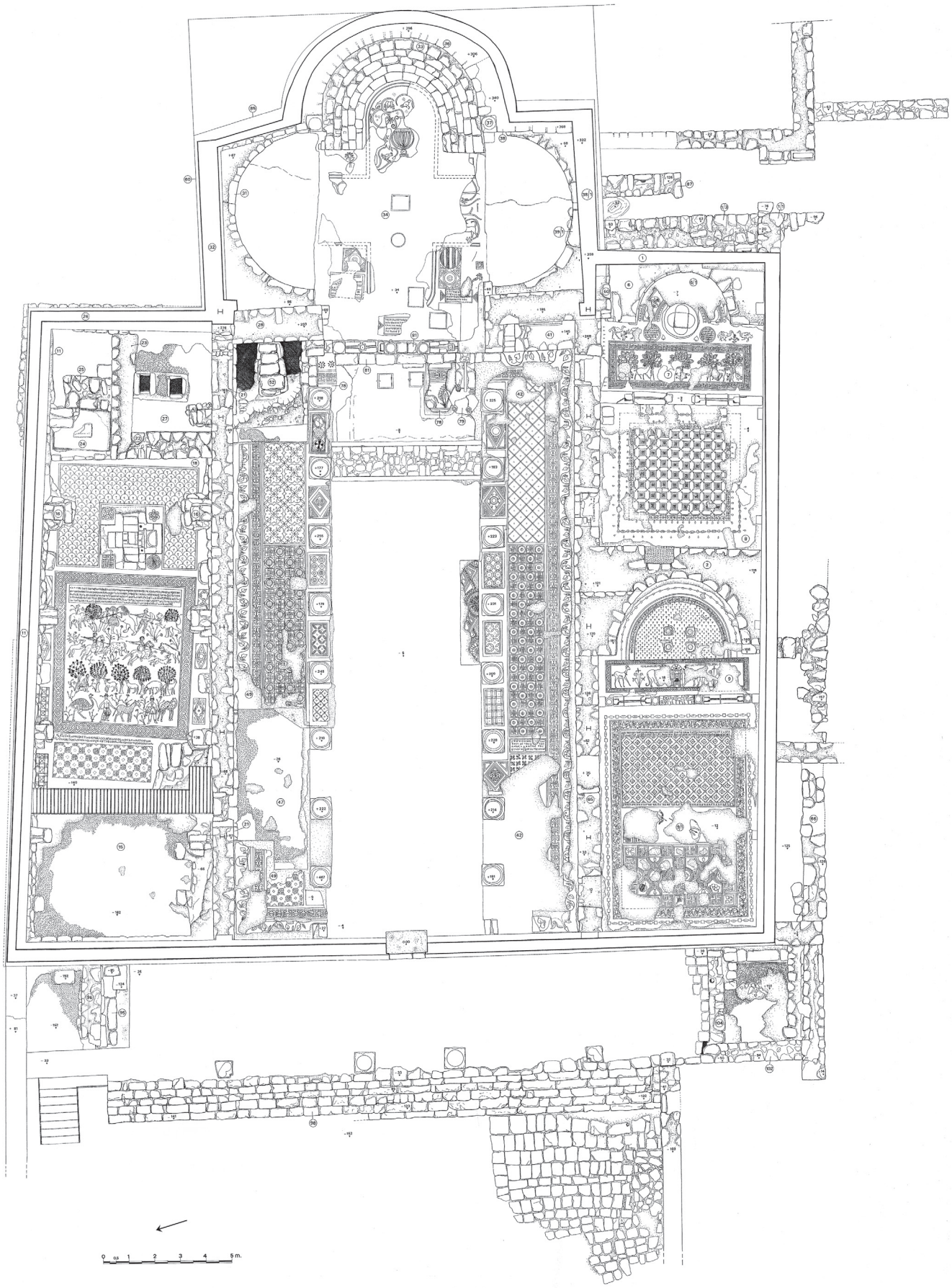

Fig. 14 Memorial of Moses. Plan of the Basilica.

5, 6, 7, 9) and two small bricks joined by lime, of the type commonly used for constructing windows (Pl. 14, no. 8)[96].

Of the stone materials, the layer revealed fragments of white marble with a fine and compact grain of the Paros type and a polished and shiny surface (Fig. 26). A second group is made up of fragmentary marble elements, perhaps belonging to the same liturgical feature, as they are decorated with sinuous plant clusters ending with indented leaves (Figs. 27–28). Two pieces, which were part of the lateral balustrade of the ambo, have Greek letters filled with a dark-coloured compound containing golden particles engraved on their surface[97] (Fig. 84; Pl. 13, no. 7). Lastly, some fragments (Pl. 13, no. 8) and the base of a column in local black stone, of the bituminous schist type, known in Arabic as *al-hajar neby musa* were found[98] (Fig. 29; Pl. 13, no. 9).

The only coin collected in this layer was a round piece of copper cut in an octagonal shape, the dating of which to the Umayyad or Abbasid period is uncertain due to its poor state of preservation[99].

On the other hand, SU3, placed underneath the column up to the level of the floor of the *synthronon*, contained pottery sherds dated to the early 6th cent. and inorganic material similar to that of the previous layer. Of the three coins which were found, the latest can be dated between A.D. 425 and 435[100].

Later, two distinct levels of the steps, which were completely demolished, were identified. SU4, on which the foundation of the *synthronon* rested, was made up of a compact layer of yellowish soil. The diagnostic pottery, including a fragment of a Byzantine oil lamp with decorations and a pinched type of handle, ascribe the layer to the same periods as the previous SU (Pl. 4, no. 11). The only coin collected, of Valentinian II (A.D. 383–392), was outside its context[101].

After SU4 was removed, SU5 was recognized, corresponding to the black layer already known from V. Corbo's excavation[102]. The pottery finds include ceramic fragments of a pot lid (Fig. 31; Pl. 6, no. 11), rims and bottoms of cups used between the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th cent. A.D.[103] (Pl. 7, nos. 14–19), a fragment of *terra sigillata* with the print of a rosette[104] (Fig. 30; Pl. 7, no. 20), and a wall with two painted signs very similar to the Greek letters *Epsilon* and *Xi* (Pl. 5, no. 1). Sieving returned tesserae of mosaics, small pieces of plaster, vitreous fragments, plant seeds and coal.

The excavation continued with the identification of SU6, with compact soil and material mainly made up of fine fragments of pottery dated to the 4th cent. A.D. (Pl. 8), with the exception of the bottom of a receptacle attributable to the Middle Bronze Age (Pl. 8, no. 10). SU7, with softer soil of a blackish colour, developed in correspondence with the wall of the apse, being identified with the cutting of the foundation for the rebuilding of the latter. After having fully removed SU7 it was possible to examine the whole construction and appearance of the walls of the apse and identify blocks of stone, pertinent to the reconstruction of the structure[105] (Fig. 32).

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96 Other examples in the documentation of the excavation of the baptistery, see Bagatti 1985, 258 figs. 6. 4; pl. 4. Also see Saller 1941, 64–65 fig. 12.

97 Acconci 1998, 525–527 no. 150. For the analysis of the architectural liturgical fragment, see below, 96.

98 For a classification of this type of stone, see Marino 2004, 47.

99 See coin no. 24 in the numismatic note.

100 See coins nos. 3. 9. 14 in the numismatic note.

101 See coin no. 4 in the numismatic note.

102 Corbo 1970, 273–298 plan 2.

103 Other examples in the documentation of the excavation of the northern hall or room of the catechumens, see Bagatti 1985, 265 fig. 10, 1; photo 12.

104 TS-12-V-70. Also see in Bagatti 1985, 253 fig. 1, 4; photo 5, 2. Other comparisons in Hayes 1972, 232 nos. 34–40.

105 The texture of the walls of the *cella trichora* presents numerous stone elements characterized by rusticated ashlars measuring between 45 and 60 cm, but in some cases up to 90 cm. The rusticated ashlars were constructed with a summary reduction of the mass and contoured by flat anathyrosis. See Marino 2004, 53.

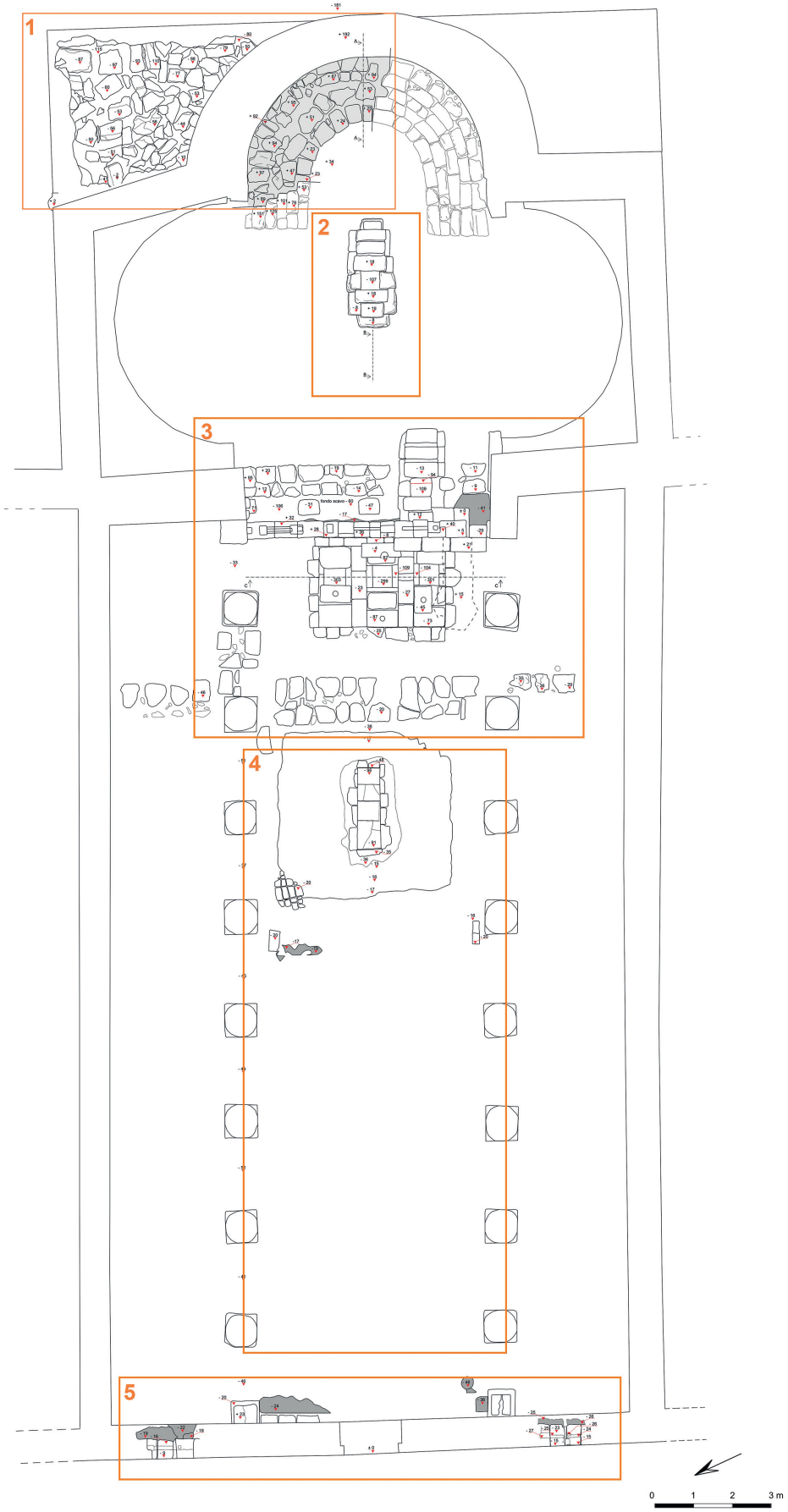

Fig. 15 Memorial of Moses. Plan with the areas of excavation.

Fig. 16 Memorial of Moses. Presbytery of the Basilica, demolition of the upper rows of the *synthronon* – layer SU2.

Fig. 17 Memorial of Moses. Presbytery of the Basilica, bottom of the excavation and foundation level of the apse.

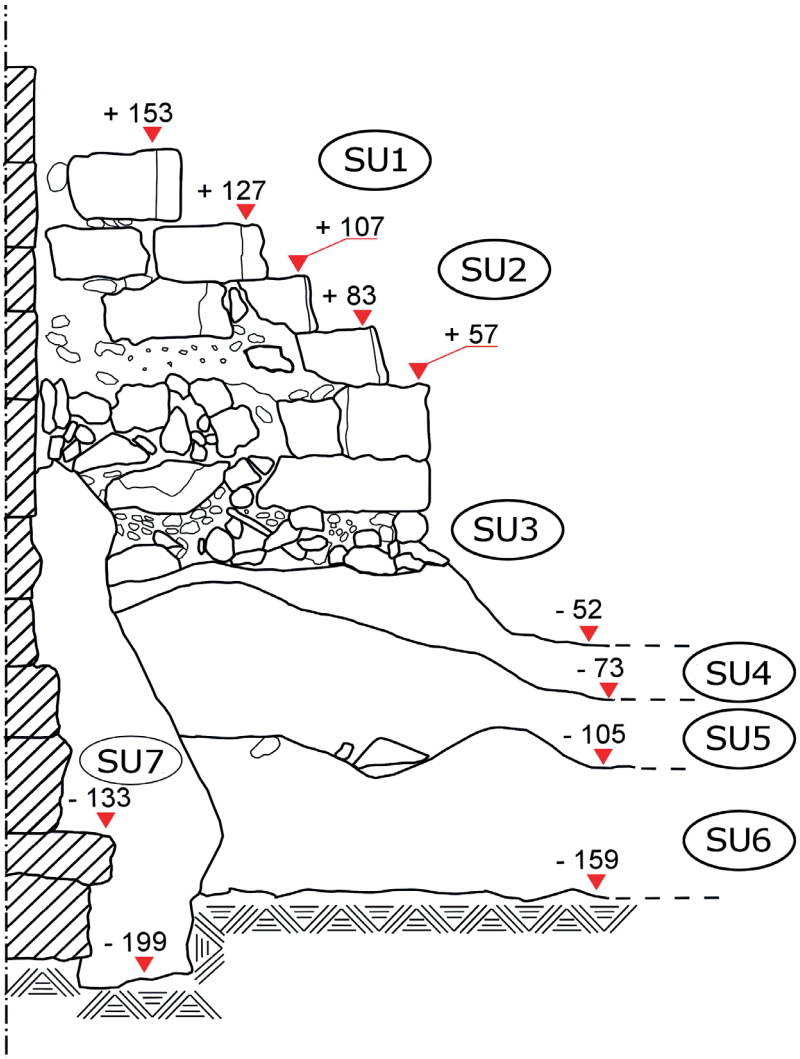

Fig. 18 Memorial of Moses. Presbytery of the Basilica, cross-section of the excavation of the *synthronon*.

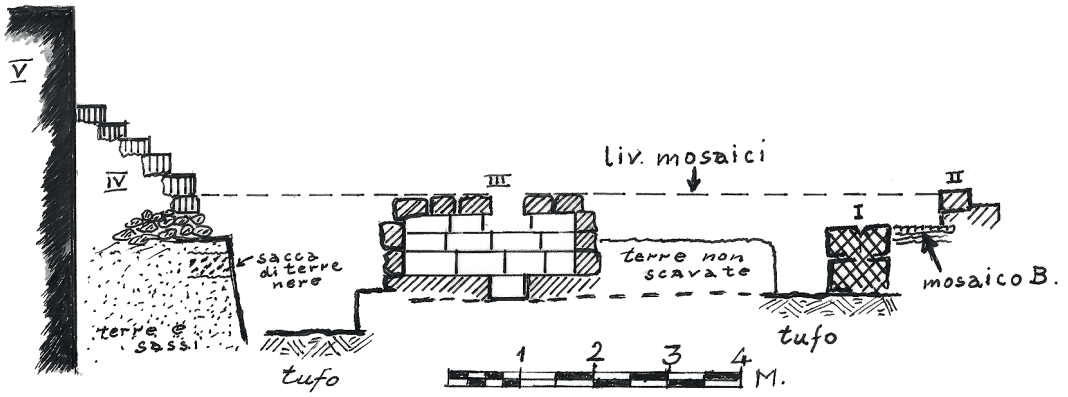

Fig. 19 Memorial of Moses. Presbytery of the Basilica and cross-section of the *cella trichora* after the excavations by SALLER (after Corbo 1970, 275, plan 2.).

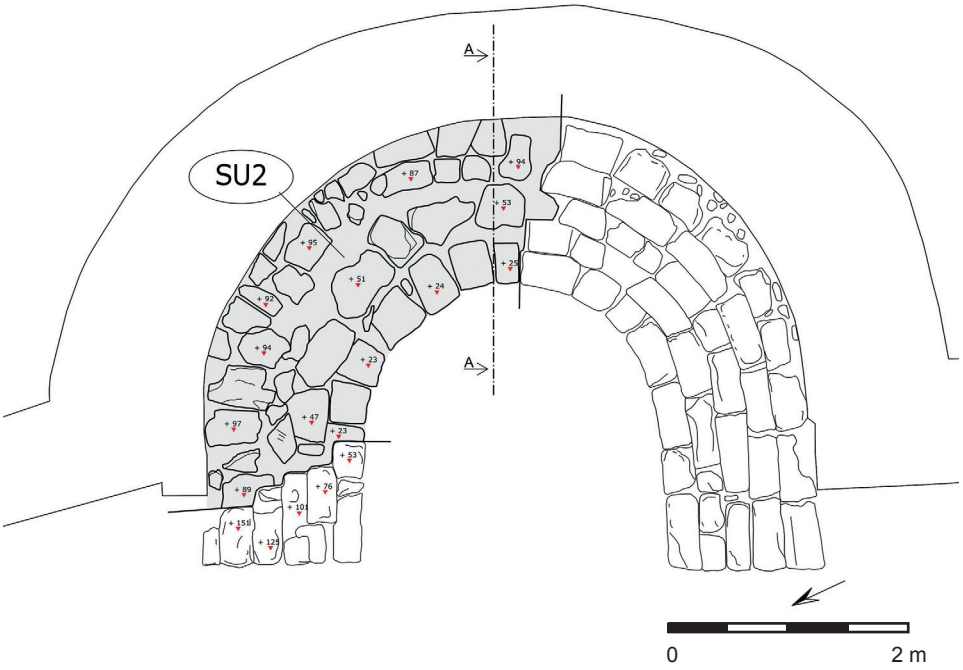

Fig. 20 Memorial of Moses. Presbytery of the Basilica, plan of the *synthronon* after the demolition of the upper rows.

The wall stratification analysis has also ascertained that the side of the stone blocks with bossage is generally on the outer side. In one case, at the level of the foundation, the bossage was however still visible on the internal side of the church. This element, attested on other walls of the monastery, suggested to scholars that the stones with bossages on the interior were salvaged elements placed on restructured walls, even in ancient times[106]. However, it should be borne in mind that some architectural historians have seen in this type of decoration a motivation of a practical nature, as well as an aesthetic one[107]. The stonemasons usually worked only on the

106 In particular for room no. 56, see Marino 2004, 53 note 20.
107 Marino 2004, 53.

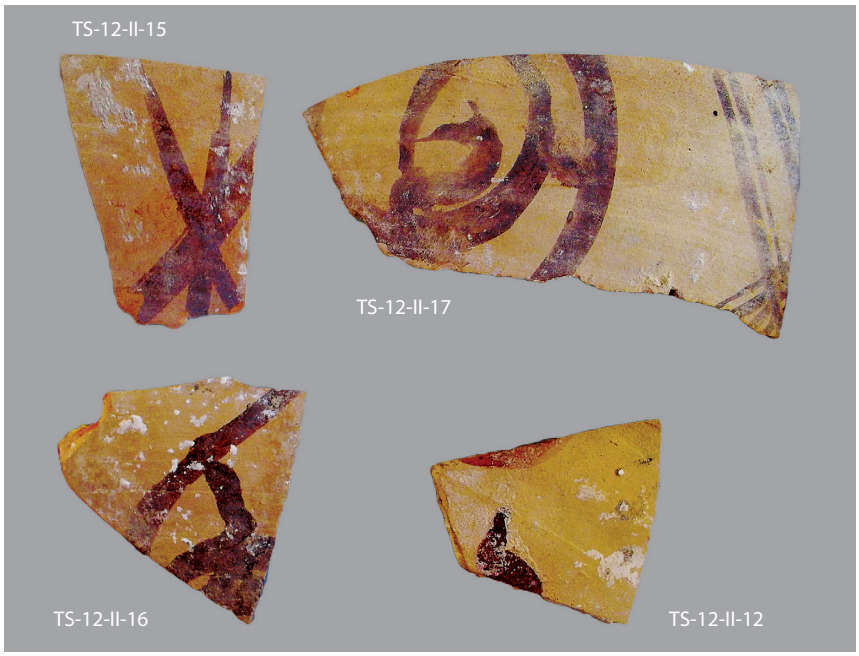

Fig. 21 Memorial of Moses. Umayyad pottery sherds from the excavation of the *synthronon*.

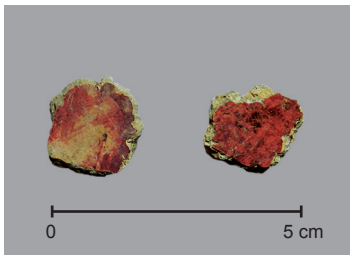

Fig. 22 Memorial of Moses. Plaster fragments from the excavation of the *synthronon*.

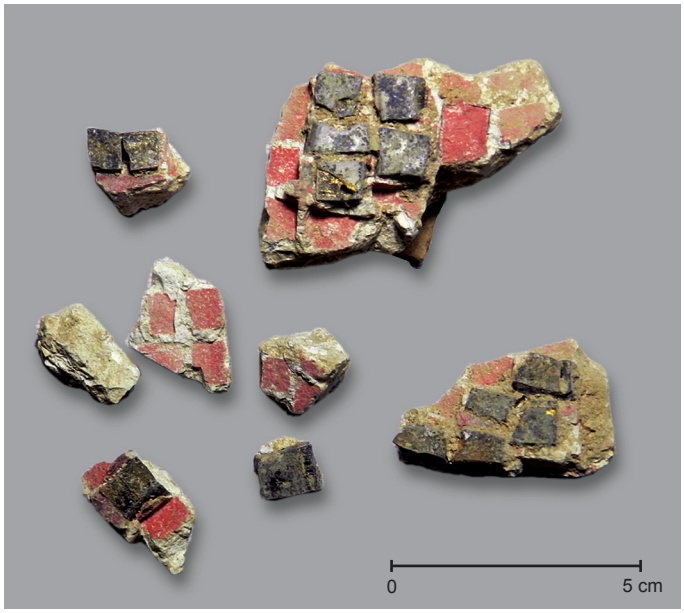

Fig. 23 Memorial of Moses. Mosaic glass tesserae from the excavation of the *synthronon*.

faces of contact, postponing the elimination of the excess rusticated ashlars to a second phase. However, the blocks to be buried or covered were laid immediately without further work.

The pottery sherds recovered in SU7 are heterogeneous from the morphological and chronological point of view, but fragments from the Umayyad period are absent (Pls. 9–10). Several sherds related to different types of oil lamps have been found in this layer (Figs. 34–35). The organic material included a fragment of carved wood in a good state of conservation (Fig. 33; Pl. 12, no. 4).

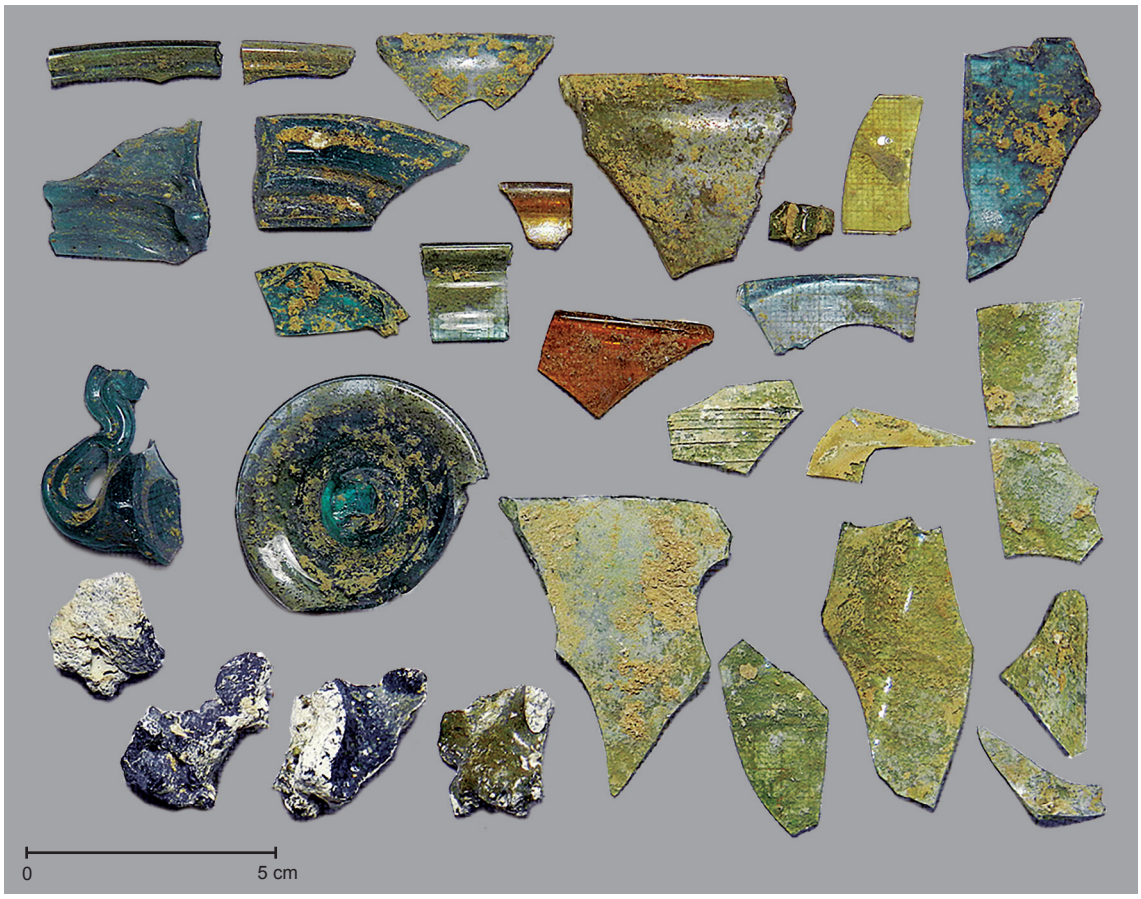

Fig. 24 Memorial of Moses. Pieces of vitreous paste and fragments of glass vessels from the excavation of the *synthronon*.

Fig. 25 Memorial of Moses. Iron nails and bronze chains from the excavation of the *synthronon*.

Fig. 26 Memorial of Moses. Fragments of white marble from the excavation of the *synthronon*.

Fig. 27 Memorial of Moses. Fragment of lateral balustrade of the ambo from the excavation of the *synthronon* and others from previous excavations.

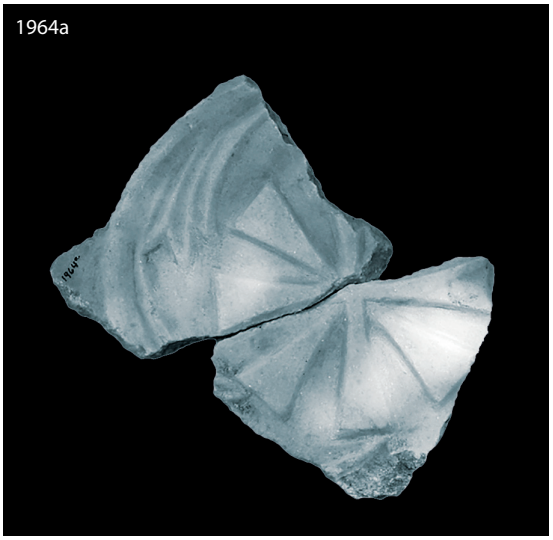

Fig. 28 Memorial of Moses. Fragment of lateral balustrade of the ambo from the excavation of the *synthronon* and others from previous excavations.

Fig. 29 Memorial of Moses. Base of bituminous schist column from the excavation of the *synthronon*.

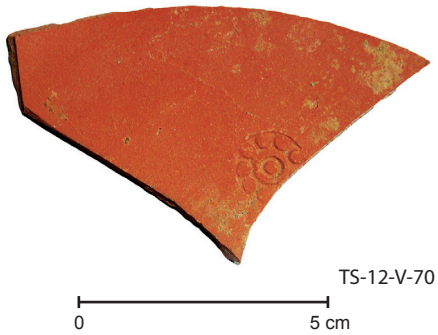

Fig. 30 Memorial of Moses. Fragment of *terra sigillata* from the excavation of the *synthronon*.

Fig. 31 Memorial of Moses. Fragments of one pot lid from the excavation of the *synthronon*.

Fig. 32 Memorial of Moses. Texture of the wall of the apse after the excavation of the *synthronon*.

Fig. 33 Memorial of Moses. Carved wooden fragment from the excavation of the *synthronon*.

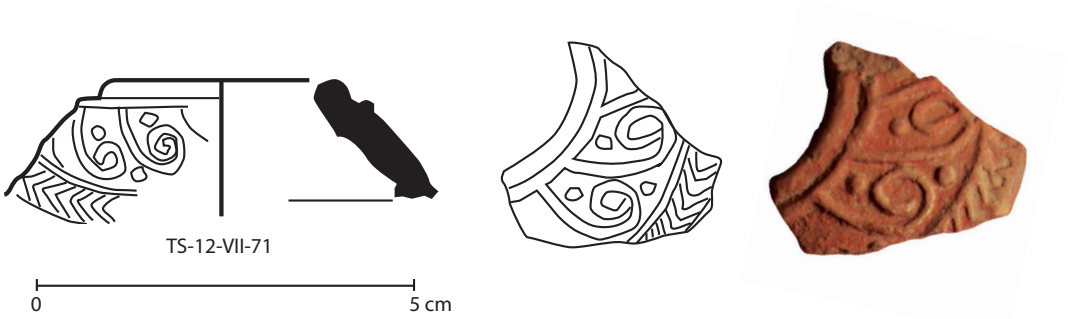

Fig. 34 Memorial of Moses. Fragment of oil lamp from the excavation of the *synthronon*.

Fig. 35 Memorial of Moses. Fragments of torches from the excavation of the *synthronon* and one intact torch found in previous excavations.

1.1.1.2 Excavation of the "buttress" in the north-eastern corner of the cella trichora

This survey concerned the north-eastern corner of the *cella trichora*. After removing a double layer of modern cement, a massive buttress was identified, made up of two distinct stratigraphic units (Figs. 36–37). SU8, which presented a series of stones of large dimensions arranged neatly against the external walls, returned a coin with the effigy of Augusta Aelia Flacilla and another more worn one, dated between the 4th and the 5th cent. A.D.[108]. SU9, made up of an irregular agglomerate of stones of smaller sizes against and under the walls of the apse, returned a small quantity of pottery (from the diagnostic findings, the oldest is dated to the Umayyad period) (Pl. 15) and some mosaic and vitreous tesserae of various colours, of which one-third are golden.

Type - Colour	Weight of 100 tesserae (kg)	Average weight of 1 tessera (gr)	Total weight (kg)	Number of tesserae
Black	0.15	1.5	2.18 (calc.)	1453
Grey	0.18	1.8	0.48 (calc.)	267
Red	0.21	2.1	2.25 (calc.)	1071
Pink	0.21	2.1	0.39 (calc.)	186
Yellow	0.22	2.2	0.52 (calc.)	236
Beige	0.20 (calc.)	2	0.12	60
Small White (1 cm)	0.20	2	3.44 (calc.)	1720
Medium White (1.5 cm)	0.40	4	0.60	150
Large White (2 cm)	2.00 (calc.)	20	1.20	60
Vitreous tesserae	0.30	0.3	0.03	100

Table 1. Statistical survey of the mosaic tesserae found in the *synthronon.*

A statistical investigation on the quality of mosaic tesserae found in the excavation of the *synthronon* led to an interesting result regarding the chromatic use of the individual stones in mosaic floors (Table 1; Figs. 39–40). The black and white tesserae were used in large numbers, followed by red, whereas grey, yellow and pink ones were rare, and very few beige tesserae were used. A good number of vitreous and golden tesserae, confirmed by those found in the excavation of the external buttress of the apse[109] (Fig. 38) as well as with other discoveries during the excavations by V. Corbo and M. Piccirillo[110], given their find-spot could be related to the hypothetical decoration of the apse of the church.

1.1.2 Area 2: survey of "unexcavated soil" west of tomb no. 70

The archaeological surveys concerned the evidence left by V. Corbo at the centre of the *cella trichora* near tomb no. 70[111] (Fig. 41). In this burial place, profaned in antiquity and already studied by S. Saller[112] and C. Sanmorì[113], a detailed architectural survey was carried out,

108 See coins nos. 2 and 23 in the numismatic note.
109 See below, 50 Fig. 40.
110 Piccirillo – Alliata 1998, 548–549, pl. VI no. 6.
111 The tomb structure is 82 cm deep and was made from square-shaped blocks of rock, including the bottom. The tomb was closed by a slab with *pellaïkon*. The position of the tomb in the centre of the presbytery, probably under the altar, allows the hypothesis that it was reserved for a high prelate of the monastic community, perhaps a hegumen, or a particularly charismatic monk. Corbo 1970, 276 plan 2; Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 189 no. 70.
112 Saller 1941, 35–39.
113 Sanmorì 1998, 413–417.

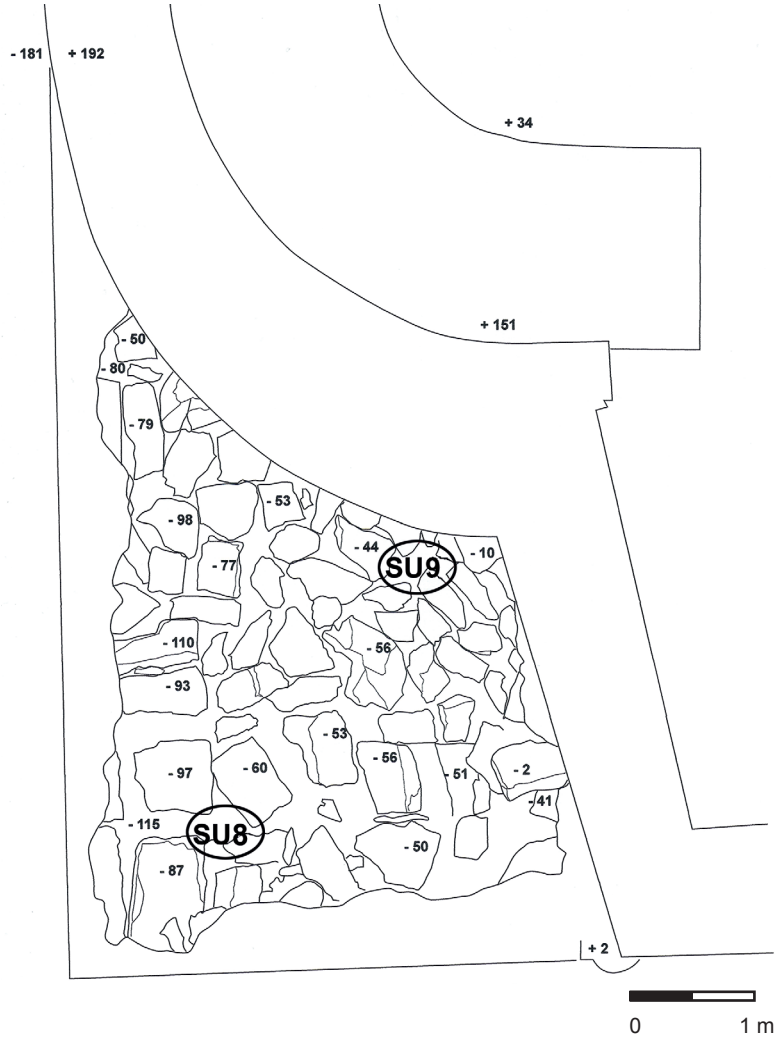

Fig. 36
Memorial of Moses. Plan of the buttress in the north-eastern corner of the *cella trichora*.

Fig. 37 Memorial of Moses. The buttress in the north-eastern corner of the *cella trichora* after excavation.

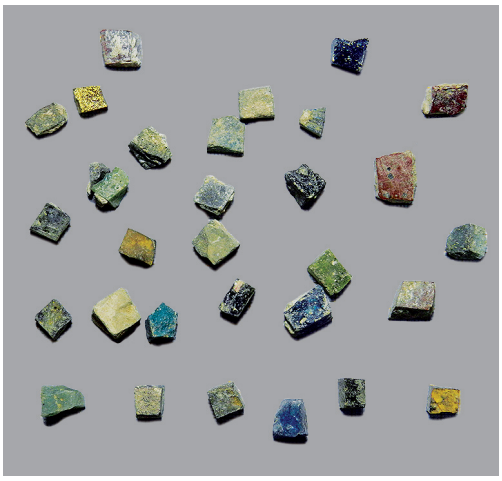

Fig. 38 Memorial of Moses. Mosaic glass tesserae from the excavation of the buttress of the *cella trichora*.

Fig. 39 Groups of coloured mosaic tesserae from the excavation of the *synthronon*; the step to the presbytery; the central nave.

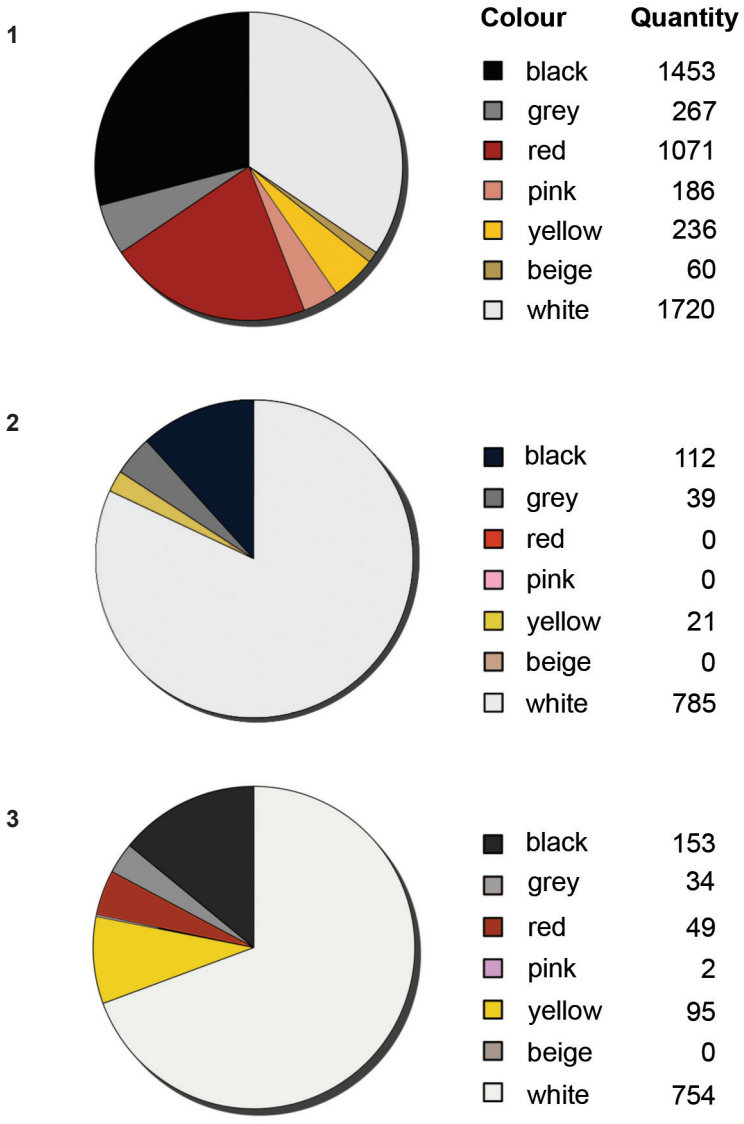

Fig. 40 Pie chart: statistics on the colours of the mosaic tesserae from three areas: 1: *synthronon*; 2: step to the presbytery; 3: central nave.

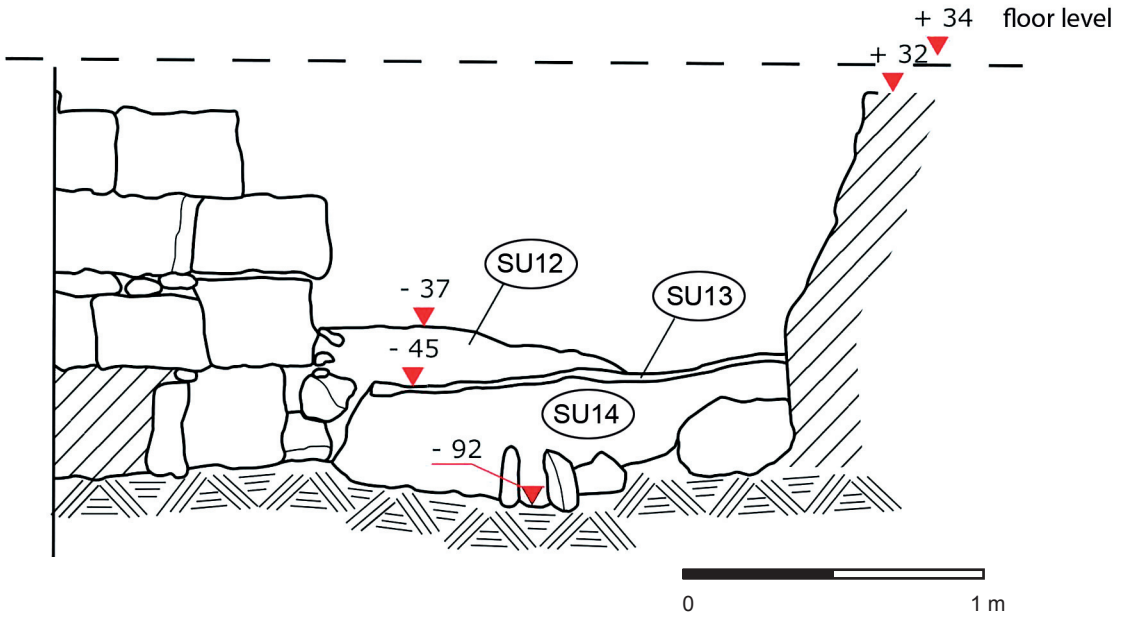

Fig. 41 Memorial of Moses. Section of the assay "unexcavated soils" west of tomb no. 70.

Fig. 42 Memorial of Moses. Lower jaw fragments from the tomb no. 70, frontal view.

Fig. 43 Memorial of Moses. Lower jaw fragments from the tomb no. 70, horizontal view.

as well as recovering the bones[114] for their morphological study. The preliminary assessments allowed the recognition of two lower jaw fragments; nine fragments of skull bones; eight fragments of vertebrae of the backbone; general fragments of various dimensions which, however, due to the violation of the tomb, do not necessarily belong to a single individual[115] (Figs. 42–44). After having removed the layer of cement, a surface layer made up of the modern filling SU10, containing different types of Byzantine tiles and bricks was identified (Pl. 14, nos. 1–4). Near the walls of the tomb, the soil appeared to have been disturbed by its excavation; this layer, SU11, returned pottery from the second half of the 5th cent. A.D. (Pl. 16, nos. 1–7).

[114] The bones were placed in a wooden box during the 1933–1935 excavations.
[115] Saller 1941, 36.

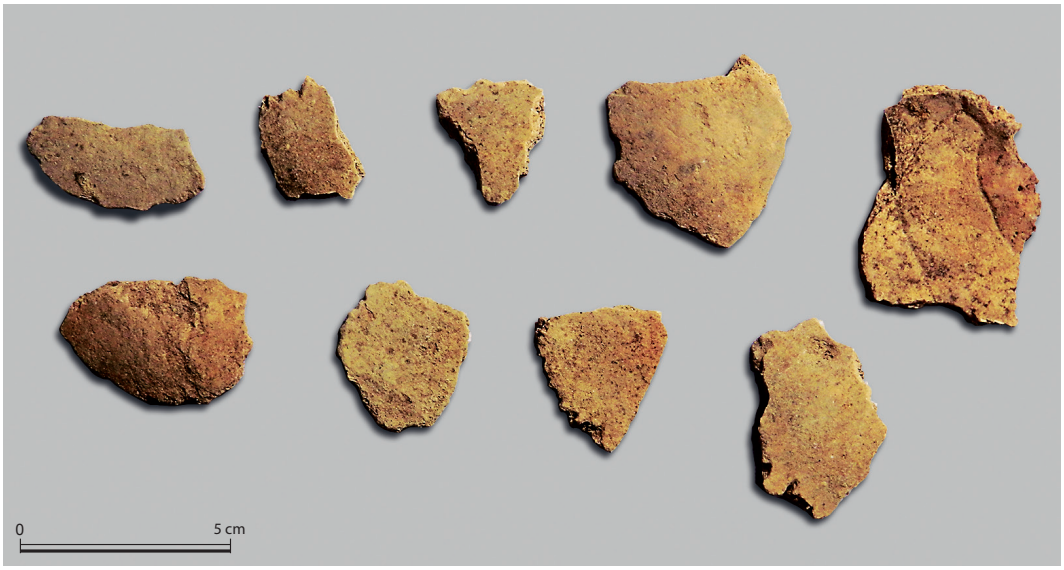

Fig. 44 Memorial of Moses. Fragments of skull bones from the tomb no. 70.

Fig. 45 Memorial of Moses. Assay west of tomb no. 70, layer SU13.

Fig. 46 Memorial of Moses. Assay west of tomb no. 70, bottom of the excavation.

In the portion to the south, it was possible to recognize three layers (Figs. 45–46). SU12, more recent, was laid over a fine layer of chalk without pottery (SU13) which can be interpreted as the ground surface in the building phases of the tomb. SU14, older because cut from the tomb, ended in correspondence with the rock of the mountain (Pl. 16, no. 8). The soil conformation of the layer and the finds found there put it into direct relation with SU6. The coin found in SU14 was minted in the 4th–5th cent. A.D. which allows the layer to be ascribed to this chronological context[116].

1.1.3 Area 3: survey in the area of access to the *cella trichora* and to the three tombs

The archaeological investigations then moved to the area of access to the *cella trichora* to better understand its structure and in particular the relative connection with the areas of the nave (Fig. 47).

1.1.3.1 Trench between the bossage wall and the step of access to the presbytery

The survey was carried out to ascertain the presence of the mosaic with white tesserae identified by V. Corbo in correspondence with the bossage wall[117] (Fig. 48). However, after having removed the cement and the filling gravel, only one row of tesserae placed under the step of access to the *cella trichora* was visible (SU15).

The investigations, continued with the opening of a complete assay in the area between the bossage wall and the steps of the presbytery, returned two distinct stratigraphic units. SU16, a soft and compact black layer rested on, and was therefore subsequent to, the masonry of the *cella trichora*, the bossage wall and the foundation of the steps of the presbytery. It appeared clear from the excavation that the foundation of the *cella trichora* was not linked with the bossage wall, but rested on it, therefore being posterior to it. The layer returned numerous mosaic tesserae, pottery sherds, carbon, glass, bones and a trapezoid block of rock with one face worked in bossage placed on top of another of foundation, perfectly parallel with the wall identified by V. Corbo[118]. The coin found was minted by Theodosius II/Valentinian III (A.D. 425–435) and therefore suggests a chronological context of the second quarter of the 5th cent. A.D.[119]. SU17, on the other hand, extended in the northern part of the excavation assay and was characterized by a different consistency of terrain. An ashlar of an arch, with grooves to pour in molten lead, placed on top of a foundation stone perfectly in axis with the rock block of SU15 and parallel to the wall in bossage (Fig. 49) was found in the layer. The two stones could therefore form the bases of the foundation of two parallel arches, and perpendicular to the wall in bossage, which would have formed the roof of area "*B*"[120] (Fig. 79).

The excavation assay south of tomb no. 71[121] allowed the stratigraphic relationship to be verified between the wall in bossage and the perpendicular one placed under the subsequent outer masonry of the *cella trichora*. The two walls are linked by a layer of plaster in correspondence with the corner. After removing the modern cement, in the corner between the two walls a mosaic with large white tesserae SU18 with closing tesserae was found (Fig. 50).

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116 See coin no. 13 in the numismatic note.

117 The remains of a mosaic pavement and very large white tesserae were identified by V. Corbo against the western side of the walls. Corbo 1970, 278 plans 1, 2.

118 Corbo 1970, 277–279; Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 185 no. 30.

119 See coin no. 8 in the numismatic note.

120 It has been decided to keep the standard name proposed by E. Alliata and S. Bianchi. See in Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 152.

121 Tomb structure placed south-east of the central burial of the *cella trichora*. The structure shows numerous architectonic analogies with the central tomb. It is worth remembering that during S. Saller's excavations, coins from the 4th–5th centuries were recovered, including two minted by the emperor Arcadius (A.D. 395–408), Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 189 no. 71.

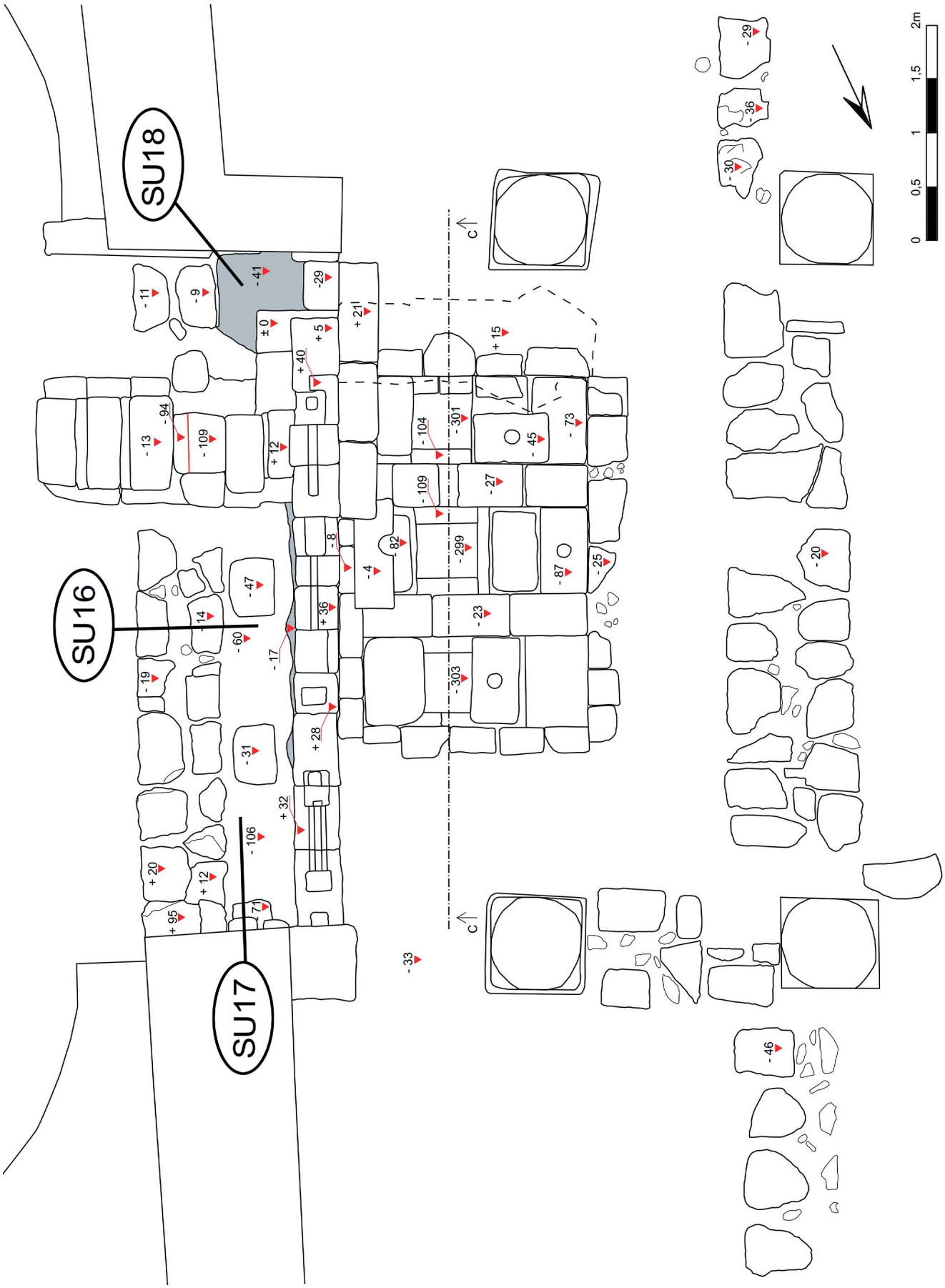

Fig. 47 Memorial of Moses. Plan of the area of access to the *cella trichora* and to the three tombs.

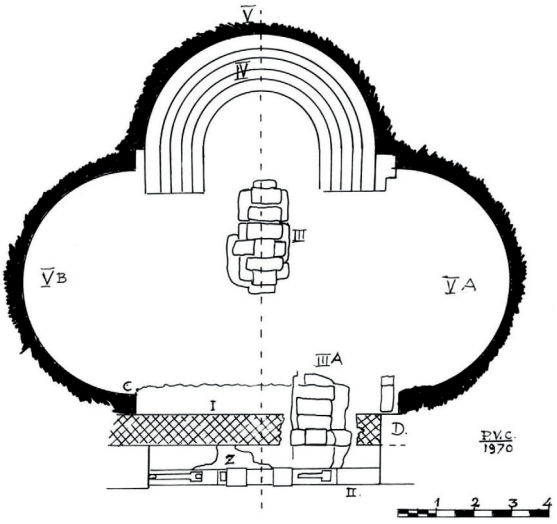

Fig. 48
Memorial of Moses. Plan of the *cella trichora* after the excavations by Corbo. Note the mosaic with white tesserae marked by Z and the wall in bossage with the letter I (after Corbo 1970, 274).

Fig. 49 Memorial of Moses. Arch ashlar with grooves for pouring molten lead found in SU17.

Fig. 50 Memorial of Moses. Detail of SU18.

The mosaic pavement, already documented by V. Corbo in photographs only[122], is of reduced dimensions and ends on the western side in correspondence with a stone protruding from the step of the presbytery. Unfortunately, the northern side has been disturbed by cutting the tomb which prevents understanding how it developed. The most interesting element concerns the level; although it is typologically similar to the fragment under the step, the mosaic is at a lower level[123] identifying the fragment as part of the possible tub for washing the pavement.

The statistical survey of the mosaic tesserae, collected in a very small area and belonging to the building phase of the steps themselves, confirmed the wider use of white tesserae and definitely smaller quantities of black and grey ones; red, pink, beige, and small white tesserae are absent (Table 2).

Type - Colour	Number of tesserae
Black (1 cm)	112
Grey (1 cm)	39
Red	0
Pink	0
Yellow (1 cm)	21
Beige	0
Small White	0
Medium White (1–1.5 cm)	785
Large White (+2 cm)	216

Table 2. Survey of mosaic tesserae found in the foundations of the steps of the presbytery

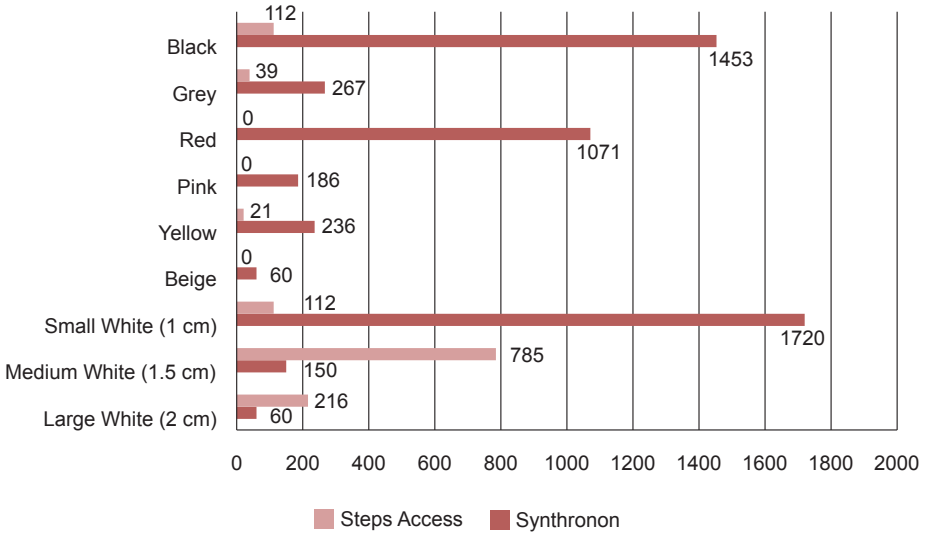

Diagram 1 Comparative diagram between the mosaic tesserae found in the excavation of the *synthronon* and those near the steps of access to the presbytery

[122] Corbo 1970, 279.
[123] The level of the mosaic under the step is −17, that of the presumed tub is −41.

Fig. 51 Memorial of Moses. The area of access to the presbytery after SALLER's excavation.

Fig. 52 Memorial of Moses. Detail of the excavation in the area of access to the presbytery.

1.1.3.2 Investigation on the three tombs (nos. 72–74) and the area of access to the presbytery

Operations took place with the aim of carrying out the architectonic survey of the three tomb structures already known to S. SALLER[124] and to study them in connection with the development of the *cella trichora* (Fig. 51). The area to the north, near the steps of access to the presbytery and the area comprised between the tomb and the foundation of the wall to the west were also covered by the research (Fig. 52).

After having measured the levels of the tombs (Fig. 53), it appeared clear that the covering stones were placed at a higher level (–4) with respect to that of the white mosaic SU15 (–17), however, the excavation of the area in front of the steps of the presbytery returns a fragment of the same white mosaic which covers the tomb in one part (SU22) (Fig. 54). This therefore confirms the previous hypothesis of E. ALLIATA and S. BIANCHI, according to whom the mosaic

[124] Saller 1941, 38–39 pl. 161; Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 189 nos. 72. 73. 74.

Fig. 53 Memorial of Moses. Detail of the excavation in the area of the three tombs (nos. 72–74).

formed the floor level of the area "*B*" under which there were the three tombs[125]. The three tombs have been documented photographically and graphically (Figs. 55–57).

1.1.3.3 Assay under the ambo

The excavation operations also concerned the area of the ambo to better clarify the stratigraphy under the two mosaics indicated by S. SALLER[126], of which the upper one, called "of the wild beast", was discovered and torn during V. CORBO's excavations[127]. Under the modern cement layer there was the filling SU19 which obliterated the entrance of the south tomb; inside it a block of rock was found, used in antiquity as a support for the subsequent positioning of the ambo (Figs. 58–59). The later pottery sherds, found in the layer together with the white mosaic tesserae, can be dated to the middle of the 6th cent. A.D. (Pl. 17). The only coin found was minted in the second half of the 5th cent. A.D.[128]. The southern portion of the excavation returned a layer without diagnostic materials which ended underneath with the rock of the mountain (SU20).

1.1.3.4 Investigation between the three tombs and the western wall

The excavation, extended in the area comprised between the tombs and the western wall, allowed the identification of the phase when the tombs were built. The layer SU21 returned two coins, one ascribable to the years A.D. 383–425, the other more generally to the chronological horizon comprised between the 4th and 5th cent. A.D.[129].

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125 The mosaic is made up of a set of tesserae of very large dimensions. See in detail the description in Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 158. 187–188 nos. 50–51.

126 S. SALLER describes the superimposition of two mosaic levels under the ambo. Saller 1941, 38.

127 Fragment of figurative polychromatic mosaic belonging to the central nave of the basilica, located under the base of the ambo on the southern side of the stairs of access to the presbytery. The fragment (188 × 113 cm) has a field of white tesserae of about 21 cm and a band 55 cm wide with a double Greek key in two colours, red and grey. This band is followed by a wider field (100 cm) with the illustration of a wild animal in the middle of trees. Corbo 1970, 281 plans 1, 9; fig. 5.

128 See coin no. 11 in the numismatic note.

129 See coins no. 5 and no. 22 in the numismatic note.

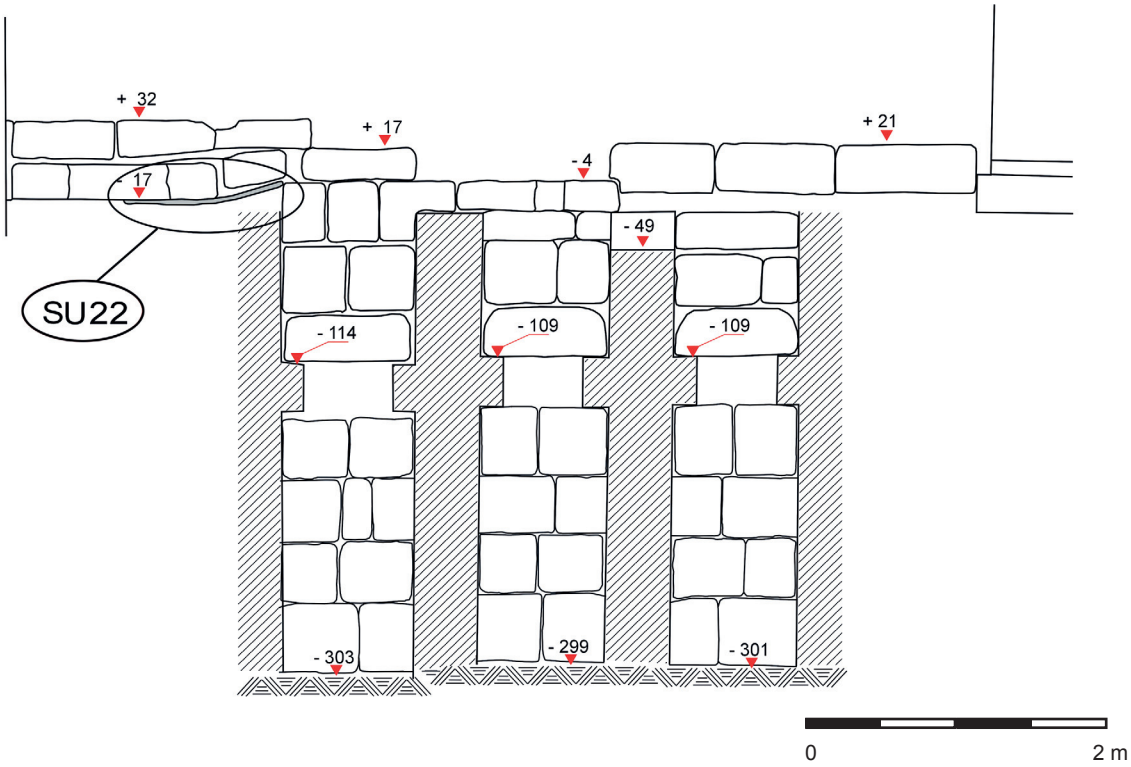

Fig. 54 Memorial of Moses. Cross-section of the area of the three tombs (nos. 72–74).

Fig. 55 Memorial of Moses. Interior masonry of the tomb no. 73.

Fig. 56 Memorial of Moses. Internal covering with *pellaïkon* of the tomb no. 73.

Fig. 57 Memorial of Moses. Tomb no. 73 after the re-opening.

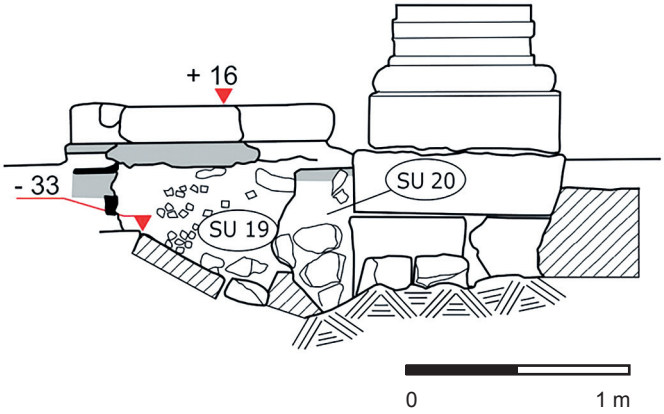

Fig. 58 Memorial of Moses. Cross-section of the excavation under the ambo.

Fig. 59 Memorial of Moses. Base of the ambo.

1.1.4 Area 4: survey in the central nave and in the northern intercolumns

The survey took place in the whole central nave and in the intercolumns of the north nave, already investigated at a superficial level by S. Saller and V. Corbo (Fig. 60). The archaeological excavation, after having removed the modern cement layer, concerned the preparatory layer (SU23) of a fairly fine white mosaic, the remains of which are visible near the wall in the façade[130] and towards the middle of the church, on the northern side[131]. The layer, which ended with the rocky level of the mountain, appeared as a fine level, containing a good amount of waste from producing the mosaic tesserae and four coins, the most recent of which was minted under Arcadius-Honorius-Theodosius (A.D. 406–408) and one uncertain, perhaps Theodosius II (A.D. 408–423)[132].

After removing the layer, five covering stones of an unfound tomb structure along the central axis of the nave, near the foundation of the eastern wall were found (Figs. 61–62). The tomb was in the centre of a square-shaped area, which the altimetric survey ascertained as being the highest point of the mountain of Ras Siyagha (Figs. 63–64). The structure is defined in its perimeter by a cut and in correspondence with the first stone, in the south-western corner, a fragment of an alabaster frame (Fig. 71; Pl. 21, no. 3) and a dark-coloured layer (SU25) were identified, containing pottery, the oldest pieces of which can be ascribed to the 1st cent. A.D. (Pl. 19). Internally, the tomb was empty; there were no organic remains or accompanying objects, these elements would suggest that the tomb was closed when it was built (Figs. 65–66). The base is made up of five slabs of pink stones 5 cm high. The lower row of the walls is in local stone and plastered with a red facing, while the upper one contains pieces of alabaster marble for filling[133] (Figs. 67–68, 73; Pl. 22).

Lastly, the excavation of this area extended to the northern *intercolumnia* from the third to the eighth[134]; where, having removed the modern cement[135], the independent foundations of the columns of the nave were recognized. Amongst the pottery which can be dated to the second half of the 6th cent. A.D., a fragment of tubular channel of a clay *polycandelon* was found which enriched the information on the oldest systems of lighting of the basilica (Pl. 20, no. 21). Worthy of note are small fragments of plaster with some characters in the Syriac language painted on them, probably belonging to the decoration of one of the intercolumns (Fig. 69). During the survey in the nave, the mosaic fragments were photographed[136] (Fig. 70).

1.1.5 Area 5: survey in the area of the façade of the basilica

1.1.5.1 Examination of the southern door in the façade of the basilica

The masonry of the western façade of the basilica was re-examined (Fig. 75). After having removed the cement flooring, two small vertical red signs painted on the masonry at the centre of the south nave were identified, in correspondence with a recess of overhanging stones and under these two fragments of mosaic with white tesserae (SU30) were recognized[137]. The three modern slabs of flooring were removed and the central section of the façade wall, already the object of contemporary restoration, was demolished.

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130 See paragraph 5 below.

131 For the discussion on this mosaic pavement, see Saller 1941, 223–224; Piccirillo 1976, 293; Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 189 no. 82.

132 See coins no. 7 and no. 10 in the numismatic note.

133 The pieces are irregular, some show mouldings, others grooves which clearly prove how the blocks must formerly have been part of another building.

134 The numbering started from the presbytery towards the western façade.

135 The mosaic of the *intercolumnia* was removed by M. Piccirillo in 1976; see Piccirillo 1976, 289–293.

136 See in detail Saller 1941, 223–224; Piccirillo 1976, 293; Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 189 no. 82.

137 As found in the photographic documentation, the two red lines had already been indicated during the excavations by V. Corbo but without having been documented or interpreted.

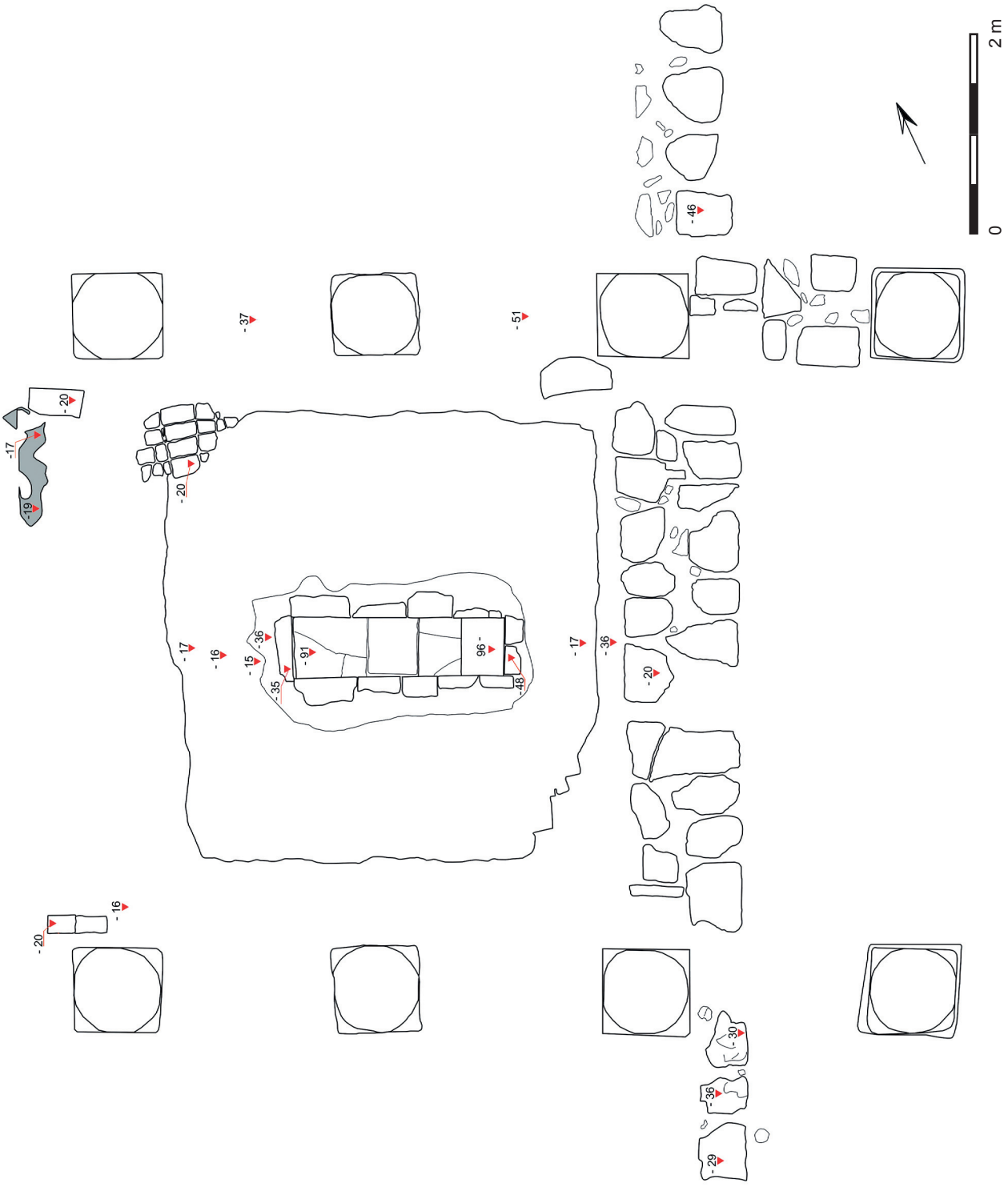

Fig. 60 Memorial of Moses. Plan of the excavation in the central nave.

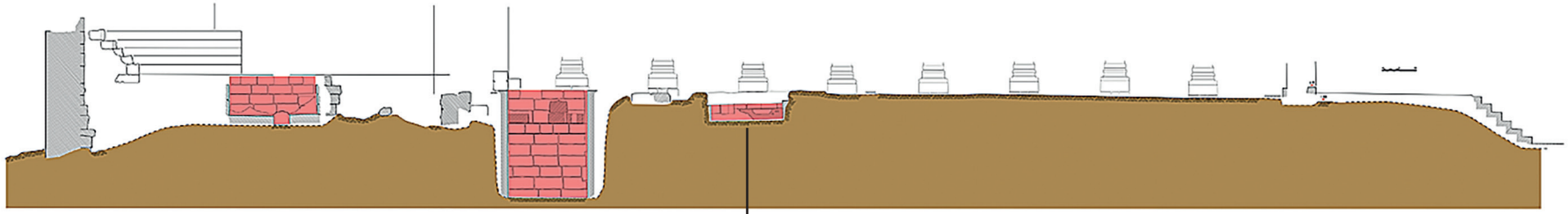

Fig. 61 Memorial of Moses. Longitudinal section of the basilica (drawing by E. ALLIATA).

Fig. 62 Memorial of Moses. Tomb in the centre of the nave at the time of discovery.

Fig. 63 Memorial of Moses. Tomb in the centre of the nave.

Fig. 64 Memorial of Moses. Tomb in the centre of the nave, detail of the rock square-shaped area.

Fig. 65 Memorial of Moses. Tomb in the centre of the nave, detail of the red plaster and of the marble row.

Fig. 66 Memorial of Moses. Tomb in the centre of the nave, detail of the five slabs of pink stones.

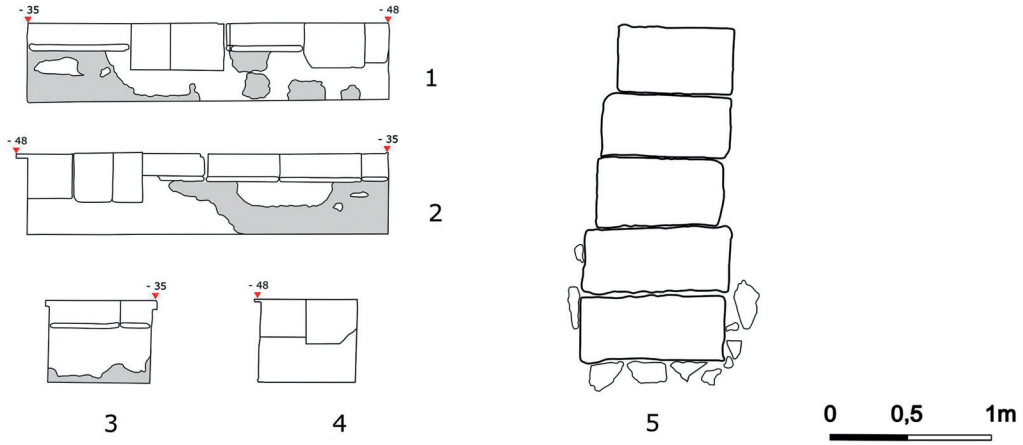

Fig. 67 Memorial of Moses. Graphic rendering of the internal prospect of the tomb and its covering.

Fig. 68 Memorial of Moses. Longitudinal view of the interior of the tomb.

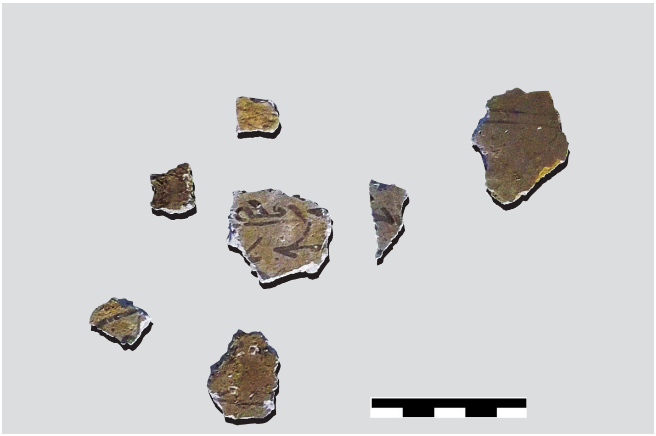

Fig. 69 Memorial of Moses. Fragments of painted plaster from the 3rd northern intercolumn.

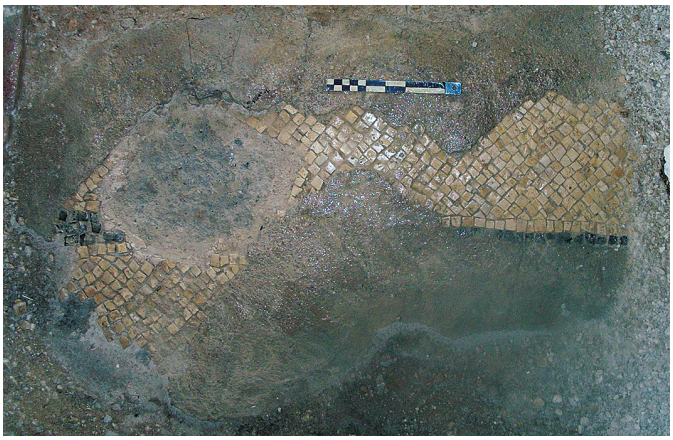

Fig. 70 Memorial of Moses. Fragments of mosaic floor with white tesserae and one decorative band in black tesserae found in the nave.

Fig. 71 Memorial of Moses. Fragment of an alabaster frame found in SU25.

Fig. 72 Memorial of Moses. Marble architectural frame found by SALLER.

Fig. 73 Memorial of Moses. Detail of an architectonic element reused in the tomb.

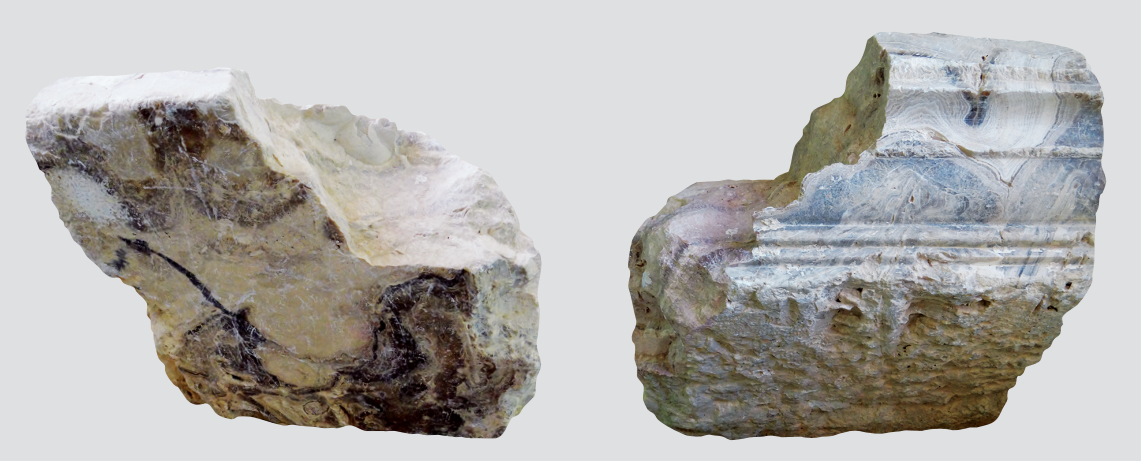

Fig. 74 Memorial of Moses. Marble architectural frame found by SALLER.

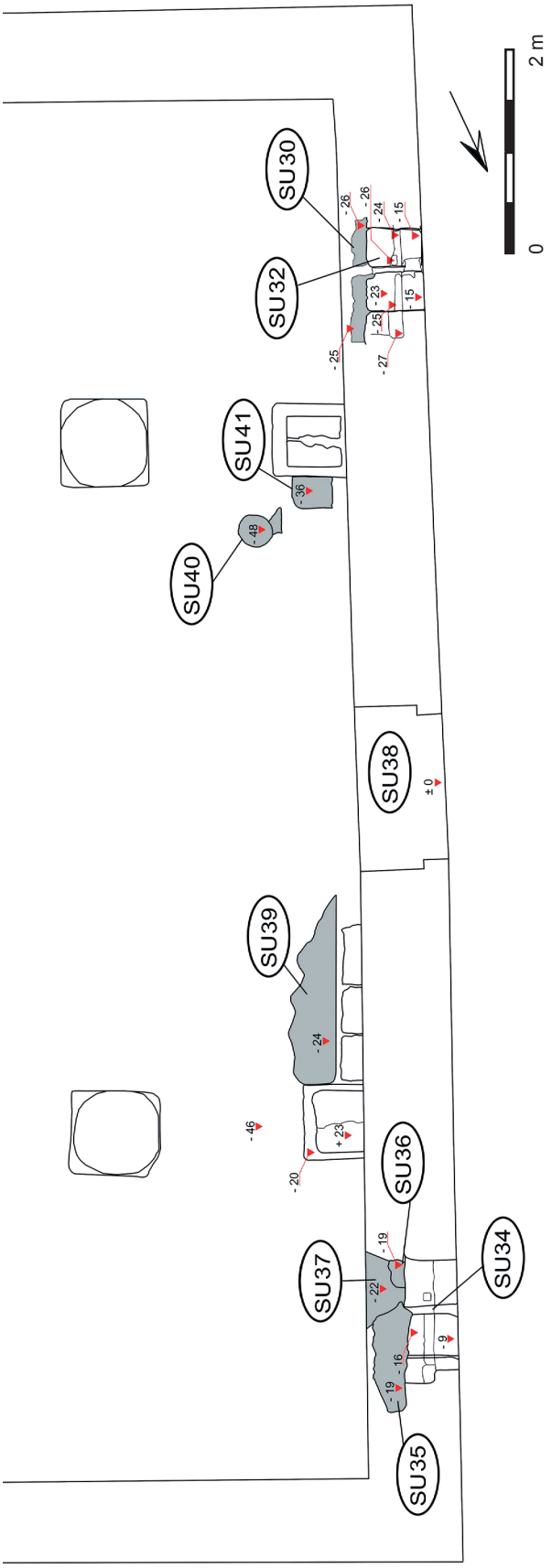

Fig. 75 Memorial of Moses. Plan of the southern side of the Basilica after the excavation.

Fig. 77 Memorial of Moses. Photo of the southern door after the excavation.

Fig. 76 Memorial of Moses. Photo of the northern door after the excavation.

Proceeding in depth, a threshold in *mizzy*[138] stones was found (SU32), divided into two parts by a groove and with the notches necessary for the insertion of the door (Figs. 75–76). The excavation ended after having brought to light the fragment of mosaic made up of small-sized tesserae (less than 1 cm), in correspondence with the start of the foundation SU33 which rested directly on the rock of the mountain (Fig. 77). A small row of tesserae, placed at the same level as SU30 (−25), was identified close to the base of the first column of the southern row (SU31).

1.1.5.2 Examination of the north door in the façade of the basilica

The modern slabs corresponding to the red marks left by V. Corbo were also removed in the northern nave and the central portion of the wall of the façade was demolished, necessary for further study. The lower row rested on the threshold SU34, made up of two stones with notches for the hinges and grooves for the door at the centre of which a square channel was recognized, to drain off water. After cleaning, it was possible to clearly recognize the ancient door of access to the northern nave, already closed up in antiquity, and three fragments of mosaic, two of which were at the same level (−19), but of a different type (Fig. 76). The first SU35, with small tesserae, could be the result of restoration in antiquity of the mosaic pavement of which the second fragment SU36 would remain with larger sized tesserae arranged in rows parallel to the wall. At a lower level (−22) a mosaic with tesserae arranged diagonally was identified, perhaps belonging to an older phase SU37.

1.1.5.3 Examination of the ancient central door in the façade of the basilica

The examination of the doors to the northern and southern naves allowed the observation that the threshold of the central door, made up of a single stone, but with reused jamb, is at a higher level (± 0) with respect to the two lateral ones (Fig. 75). The door SU38 would appear to belong to a more recent phase even though it seems to rest directly on the rock of the mountain and not on lower foundations (−15 and −16).

[138] *Mizzy* stone is a particular type of local limestone characterized by considerable hardness and very clean breakage. Two types are known: *mizzy jehudi*, very hard and with little sensitivity to the action of water with colours from white to yellow, and *mizzy helu* with a whitish colour and yellow veins. See Marino 2004, 47.

1.2 INTERPRETING THE EXCAVATION

1.2.1 The phase of construction of the first basilica (second half of the 5th cent., after A.D. 408/423)

The excavation data of the areas nos. 3, 4 and 5, supplemented by the in-depth interpretation of the monumental evidence, allow a new hypothesis to be formulated regarding the oldest building constructed on Mount Nebo (Fig. 78). Specifically, the excavation of the nave allowed the previous interpretation – which saw the space in front of the *cella trichora* as an external courtyard with a mosaic pavement – to be confuted[139].

Much more coherently, the ecclesiastical building would have been structured in a rectangular space, probably divided into three naves by two series of pilasters, according to the fairly common practice in the churches in the region[140]. As for the perimeter walls ascribable to this phase, it is possible to observe on the northern and western sides two overhanging rows which can be identified under the elevated walls today preserved (nos. 30 and 21 in Fig. 79). The northern wall[141] in *nary* stone with an east-west alignment, perpendicularly joins the western wall[142], as already suggested by E. Alliata and S. Bianchi[143]. The southern wall (no. 58 in Fig. 79), perfectly parallel to the northern wall, is perpendicular to the foundation no. 44 in Fig. 79 and in all probability had to join and end with the eastern façade characterized by the three doors[144]. The preparatory layer of the mosaic pavement connected with this phase, made of even and compact limestone (SU23), was laid directly above the rocky level of the mountain. Whether the individual surviving mosaics belong to the same mosaic remains uncertain because they are limited to some small portions close to the western façade of the church. In particular, fragment SU39, which links the northern pilaster strip and the protruding row of the western wall, is placed at the level of −24, while those in correspondence with the southern door (SU30) and the northern one (SU37) are at levels −26 and −22. The small difference could be due to slight altimetric variations caused by the natural geological movement of the mountain. Going back to the finds in the preparatory layers of the mosaic, the coins (which provide a *terminus post quem* between A.D. 408 and 423) and the pottery sherds (Pl. 18) date the construction of the pavement to the second half of the 5th cent. A.D., suggesting the same chronological horizon for the building of the church as well.

The three areas[145] (identified as *D – B – C* in Fig. 79) east of the foundation of the eastern wall of the basilica (no. 44 in Fig. 79), already interpreted by E. Alliata and S. Bianchi as the internal partition of the building limited by the northern and eastern perimeter walls are also

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139 The structure and the development of the *cella trichora* with the relative rooms open on to an external mosaic courtyard were the object of hypothetical studies by the architectural historian C. Calano and then again by E. Alliata and S. Bianchi. The same authors, due to the lack of stratigraphic data, expressed themselves with great caution. For the previous hypotheses, see Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 158–159.

140 There are numerous examples attested in Jordan, in particular in the diocese of Madaba. For a repertoire of the churches and their study, see Michel 2001, 18–33.

141 Wall of blocks of *nary* stone of which one row and part of the foundation is preserved, which protrudes with respect to the profile of the masonry above. It forms the northern perimeter of the oldest building identified so far in this survey. See Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 184 no. 21.

142 Wall structure made up of blocks of *nary*-stone of the bossage type, rectangular, combined dry and arranged in regular rows of which two/three are visible today through a hole. The wall has the same typology and construction technique as the northern perimeter wall. The wall was incorporated in new masonry when the *cella trichora* was built. See Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 185 no. 30.

143 Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 151–154.

144 The western position of the structure of the southern wall is preserved solely at the foundation level, unfortunately this element does not allow the elevation to be determined.

145 The three rooms are conventionally called "*B*" "*C*" "*D*" in the interpretation of E. Alliata – S. Bianchi. See Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 152.

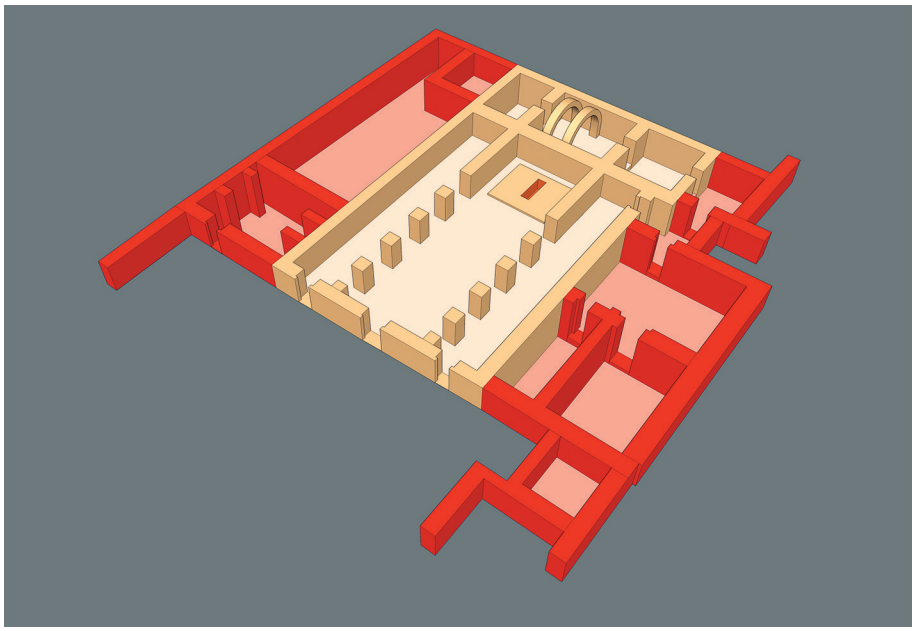

Fig. 78 Memorial of Moses. The phase of building the first Basilica – second half of the 5th century, (after A.D. 408/423) (3D reconstruction by the author).

an integral part of the complex[146]. The excavation of SU21 returned a coin minted between A.D. 383 and 425[147], which would suggest dating the building of the three tombs in area "*B*" to after the middle of the 5th cent. A.D. The three tombs were then covered by a mosaic pavement with white tesserae of which the mosaic fragment SU22 (layer of mosaic which covers the tombs in correspondence with the step) would be related, in type and level, to those found in areas north "*D*" and south "*C*" already identified in the previous excavation campaigns by S. Saller and V. Corbo[148]. In addition, the coins and the pottery found above the mosaic and in the soil that covered the surface of the perimeter walls of area "*C*" confirm a dating to the mid-5th cent.[149]. It is worth recalling that the quality of the mosaic of area "*C*", decorated with a cross with white and black tesserae, matches the excavation data[150]. The central area "*B*" would have had a cover with arches of which the two blocks of the foundations have been identified and the walls would have been faced with plaster as observed in the south-eastern corner[151].

146 The foundation with a north-south trend is parallel to the eastern perimeter of the complex. The structure is made up of small and medium-sized stones put together dry. See Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 187 no. 44.

147 See coin no. 5 in the numismatic note.

148 The mosaic in room "*D*", made up of very large white tesserae, rests on the eastern perimeter of the ecclesiastic building; the mosaic of room "*C*" also in white tesserae but arranged in a diagonal pattern, has a central decoration in black tesserae made up of a cross inside of which there is a braid. The fragment rests on the foundation of the eastern wall of the first basilica. In detail, see Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 187 nos. 43. 50. 51, 1; Saller 1941, 50 and Corbo 1970, 278 pl. 2, z.

149 For the mintages, see the study in Gitler 1998, 556, nos. 30. 47. 55. 57. 58. 61; for the pottery, Bagatti 1985, 256–257 fig. 3.

150 For an analytic description of the mosaic, see Piccirillo – Alliata 1998, 268.

151 Numerous rooms with a roof resting on arches have been identified in the monastic complex of Mount Nebo. The arches could be isolated as in rooms nos. 105, 301 and 305 or as arch-walls arranged in series and parallel with one another. Of this type, the bases in the walls of the *diakonikon*, and arches preserved in their entirety in cistern no. 9 and above all of room no. 56, which have been the object of modern anastylosis.

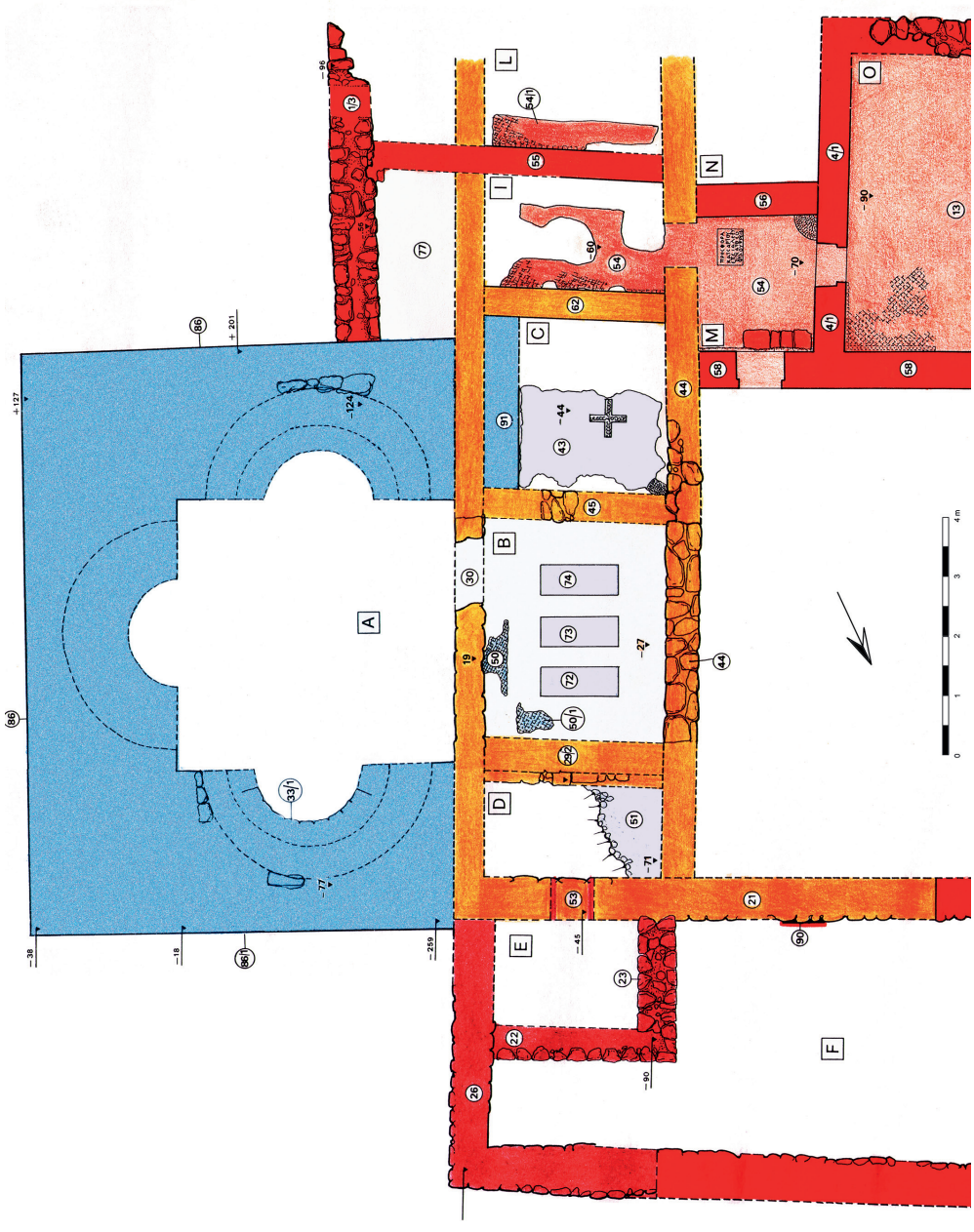

Fig. 79 Memorial of Moses. Plan with the detail of the three rooms. Graphic rendering after the excavations by Piccirillo (after Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 152.)

Given the numerous fragments of bricks for roofing found during the excavation and above all the distance of the pier of the arch it is possible to conjecture that wooden scaffolding was used[152].

A presumed funerary function is ascribed to the three distinct areas built behind the basilica's hall due to the presence of the burials in area "*B*"[153]. Nor should it be forgotten that the central tomb (no. 73 in Fig. 79) seems to have been destined for the burial of an important person as it contained the skeleton of only one individual, whereas in each nucleus of the two lateral structures, interpreted as ossuaries, the skeletal remains of eight corpses were identified[154]. This data finds interesting parallels in other contemporary monastic contexts, in particular as S. Saller recalls in the case of a monastery near Gaza where the sources inform that the Bishop Peter the Iberian was buried in a tomb at the sides of which his companions were buried[155].

It is therefore possible that the tomb structures of the area "*B*" can be identified with the well-known type of tomb *ad sanctos*, a hypothesis which is further reinforced by the vicinity of the recently discovered empty tomb. For an understanding of these three rooms, the study should not however be limited to the sole ecclesiastical building, but has to be put into relation with the more complex structure of those areas which formed the primitive nucleus of the monastic coenobitic complex on Mount Nebo.

The burial place, identified along the axis of the nave of the church, can also be ascribed to this first phase, because it is sealed by the level of preparation of the mosaic and due to the presence in SU25 of pottery which, although there are some exceptions belonging to the 1st–2nd cent. A.D., is dated to the first half of the 5th cent. A.D. (Pl. 19). The tomb was dug in a portion of the mountain rock in a square shape which is at a higher level with respect to the level of the nave. The cut, shallow and with softer soil that developed around the rocky area, suggests the presence of a step which in antiquity allowed climbing up from the nave to the area with the tomb (Figs. 63–64). It is possible to recognize in this area the presbytery, perhaps accompanied laterally by two rooms used as *pastophoria*, according to the architectonic typology of the "*sanctuaire carré*" which was widespread in the Christian Orient, especially in the Syrian region of Hawran and western Jordan, but with offshoots in Egypt, Nubia and Ethiopia, between the middle of the 5th and the early years of the 7th cent. A.D.[156].

Another element supporting the identification with the presbytery is the indication that above the tomb recalling the death of Moses, another altar had to be built to be used for the celebration of the office, as seen from a passage in the *Life of Peter the Iberian*. The text says:

> «*There at that time we learned from those who were dwelling on the mountain how those who built the temple had been fully assured that the body of the holy Moses was laid there, above which the temple was built, the table and the altar set up, and under the altar the vessel of oil and mercy, even though the divine Scripture clearly says thus, "Moses the servant of the Lord, died in the land of Moab according to the word of the Lord…*»[157]

The reference to the vessel containing oil[158], as a clue relative to the veneration of the prophet's tomb under the altar of the basilica, had already been highlighted by S. Saller,

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152 However, it is not possible to state with certainty that the fragments of tiles are connected with the roof of this room or for the subsequent basilica.

153 On this subject, see Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 151–154.

154 For the analytic study of funeral practices, see Sanmorì 1998, 419–422 and most recently Bianchi 2018, 39–47.

155 Saller 1941, 38–39.

156 For a full and updated discussion of the subject, with a catalogue of the sites that present this classification, see Weber 2010, 207–254.

157 Joh. Rufus. V. Petri. Ib. 87. Trans. by C. B. Horn – R. R. Phenix Jr, 177–179.

158 This practice can be assimilated with the well-known one for the sarcophagi of martyrs in which oil used to be poured which flowed over the bones of the deceased and leaked out laterally. The liquid thus sanctified was then mixed with powder, water and relics of the saint and with soil taken from the holy places to form the eulogies dear to the faithful. See Payne Smith 1994, 149; Gessel 1988, 183–202. For in-depth discussion of the subject, see Vikan 2010, in particular 13–17.

but without having the possibility of correctly identifying the place, now known through the archaeological survey[159]. The use in the Syriac text of the term ܗܝܟܠ [hykl] to designate the type of building constructed for the memory of the prophet and seen by the Bishop Peter in his journey to Mount Nebo should be noted. The term distinguishes linguistically a building as important and for this reason it may at times also mean palace[160]. This element is confirmed in the text of John Rufus, who indicates how the Memorial built on Mount Nebo increased its fame and prestige because it was connected with the memory of the prophet[161].

The type of the alabaster blocks in the tomb clearly appear to be reused elements already attested in the Roman imperial period (Pls. 21–22). The question is therefore raised regarding the origin of the lithic elements, i.e. whether they belonged to a previous building, and what function the tomb which was discovered empty played. The joint examination of the archaeological data and of the literary accounts allows two hypotheses to be proposed:

1. The preliminary analysis of the marble pieces has allowed the recognition of three moulded angular bases, thin slabs with protrusion and three fragments of frame. Given the incompleteness of the architectonic fragments, it is impossible to know with any certainty their original position, however it can be hypothesized that they were part of the external or internal marble facing of a building that the proportions of the pieces suggest was of modest dimensions. If production for Mount Nebo was attributed to them, the alabaster finds could have decorated the oldest funerary symbol or building commemorating the death of Moses built in Roman times[162] (Fig. 80).

In a second phase, the elevated structure could have been dismantled and the alabaster reused for the creation of the first row of the tomb which the monks thus wanted to ennoble. In this regard, it is interesting to recall the description of the church saw by the pilgrim Egeria whose visit was probably in A.D. 384[163]:

> «*So we arrived at the summit of that mountain, where there is now a church, not a large one, on the very summit of Mount Nebo. Inside that church, in the place where the ambo is, I saw a slightly raised place, occupying as much space as graves are accustomed to have*»[164]

In the Latin text, the description *ecclesia non grandis* designates the building as modest without specifying its actual dimensions, and it occurs again in the description of the pre-Justinian church on the summit of Jabal Musa at Mount Sinai. Recent archaeological surveys show that this church was much smaller than the first basilica on Nebo, of which we do not possess certain archaeological data[165]. Although mentioned by Egeria, during the excavation survey it was not

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159 Saller 1941, 343, note 3.

160 I thank M. Pazzini for mentioning this term and the useful considerations. See also in Payne Smith 1994, 103; Pazzini 1999, 152; Sokoloff 2009, 340.

161 Joh. Rufus. V. Petri. Ib. 87. I would like to thank E. Vergani for helping me reflect on the Syriac term *rab*, *rabbā*. The root, connected to the meaning of "big", can have various connotations, including "important". Therefore, as *d-saggī rab* is followed by *'al šmāhā da-nbiyā*, it could mean "that it is very important due to/in regard to the name of the prophet".

162 The use of the signs is attested in numerous funerary contexts of Late Antiquity. The many examples include the most significant ones of the Trophy of Gaius elevated above the tomb of St Peter on the Vatican hill and, to remain in an oriental context, the monument built on top of the tomb of St Philip Apostle in Hierapolis of Phrygia. In this regard, see Gualandi 2000, 391–397; D'Andria 2011–2012, 1–52.

163 The dating of Egeria's journey is not accepted by all scholars; however, the majority tend towards a chronological horizon comprised between A.D. 381 and 384. In this regard see Fabbrini 1990, 21–75 and Gelsomino 1990, 243–304. For the linguistic and philological issues Löfstedt 1980, especially 67–73; on the linguistic question also see Löfstedt 1911.

164 It. Eg. 12, 1. "*Pervenimus ergo ad summitatem montis illius, ubi est nunc ecclesia non grandis, in ipsa summitate montis Nabau. Intra quam ecclesiam, in eo loco ubi pulpitus est, vidi locum modice quasi altiorem, tantum hispatii habentem quantum memoriae solent habere*" trans. by A. McGowan 2018, 125.

165 It. Eg. 3, 3. For an analysis of the Sinai in Egeria's itinerary, see Rubin 1990, 177–191. For an updated picture of the archaeological research in the church built on the summit of Jabal Musa of Mount Sinai, see Kalopissi-Verti – Panayotidi 2010, 73–105; Dahari 2000, 28–37.

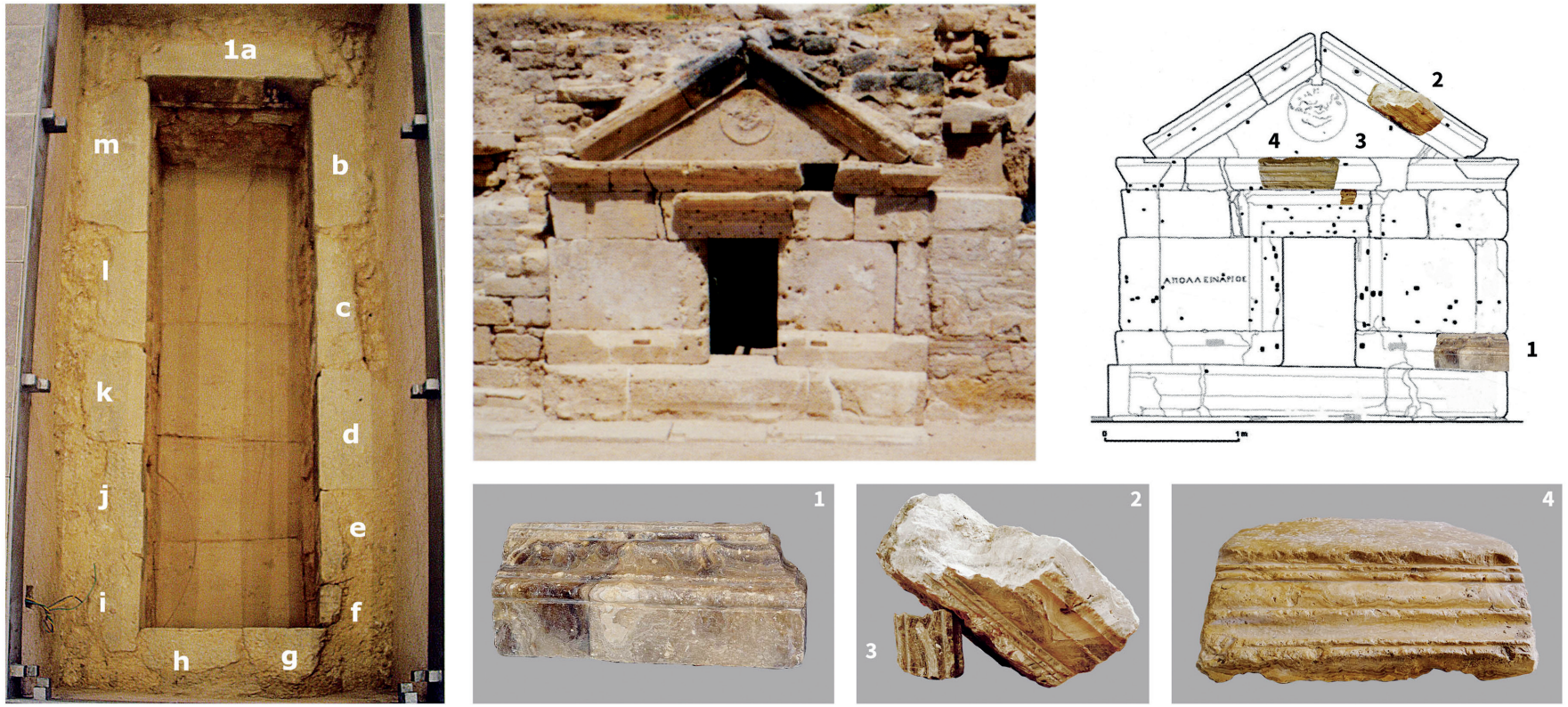

Fig. 80 Hypothetical contextualization of the architectonic elements found in the tomb of Siyagha. Comparison with the tomb of the Apostle Philip in Hierapolis, Turkey. (reconstruction by E. Alliata , pictures after D'Andria 2011–2012, 19 fig. 12).

possible to identify any architectonic evidence or stratigraphic element relative to a building that can be dated with certainty to the time of the pilgrim's visit[166]. However, the topography of the mountain, with the rocky area around the tomb placed at a higher level, would allow the hypothesis that the small church described by the pilgrim was circumscribed to this area. In reference to Moses' tomb, the pilgrim writes:

> «*For his grave, where he was laid, is not shown to this day, for as the place was shown to us by our predecessors who lived here, so always we point it out to you*»[167]

From the description, we learn that the monks did indicate to Egeria the general place linked to the prophet's burial place, but without showing her any tomb, perhaps precisely because of what the Biblical text says and noted by the pilgrim: «*No man knows how he was buried*»[168]. The recovery of small pottery fragments dated to the 1st–2nd cent. A.D. in SU25 (Pl. 19) and of marble from the tomb therefore leaves the problem of a previous occupation of the place open, which is not confirmed according to present data by any masonry structures or other diagnostic material. The oldest evidence of coins and pottery date the preparation of the mosaic of the nave to not before A.D. 408/423[169] with a difference of more than thirty years from Egeria's visit. The only other element that attests that the summit of the mountain was frequented earlier is provided by a fragmentary inscription in the Samaritan language found *in situ* from which it would appear that funerary functions were held on Mount Nebo[170].

2. More certain are the circumstances that led to building the empty tomb in the nave of the basilica which we consider dating to the second half of the 5th cent. A.D. It has to be remembered that the tomb's structure, discovered intact in June 2013, excludes any violation in antiquity. Although the absence of human remains in the tomb could possibly suggest a subsequent removal, the shallow typology of the tomb, the absence of traces of fluids of decomposition and accessories inside it or of earth, would exclude this hypothesis. The tomb would therefore be identified as a cenotaph desired by the Christian monastic community to recall the place where, according to Biblical tradition, the prophet Moses died after having seen the Promised Land[171]. In this perspective, the position of the tomb in the primitive place of devotion joins the description by Peter the Iberian who dwells on the vision of the prophet which a local shepherd had.

The realization of this memory would therefore take on a particular symbolic function which allowed the Christian faithful to go on pilgrimage to a topographically defined site, destined for the devotion of the prophet Moses. The monastic complex of the memorial on Mount Nebo becomes fully part of a structured network of shrine monasteries dedicated to Biblical figures in Jordan which will be analysed analytically in Chapter Three.

The uniquely Christian prerogative of the cenotaph is also justified by the Jewish religiosity of rabbinic tradition and of the various *targumim* which, reinforcing what is stated in the Torah, considered the burial place of Moses unknown[172]. The detailed description of the tomb of Moses, present in the text by John Rufus, appears as a bold rhetorical exercise in support of

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166 The problem had already been raised by M. Piccirillo. See Piccirillo 1990b, 212.

167 It. Eg. 12, 2. "*Nam memoria illius, ubi positus sit, in hodiernum ostenditur; sicut enim nobis a maioribus, qui hic manserunt, ubi ostensum est, ita est nos vobis monstramus*" trans. by A. McGowan 2018, 125.

168 Deut. 34, 6. "*sepulturam illius nullus hominum scit*". The comment of V. Hunink on the text deserves attention: "The passage is in some way not very clear. Probably it is a point that was usually indicated as the place where Moses was laid in the earth by the angels invisibly, but that could not officially be called 'tomb' because of the Biblical passage" in Hunink-Drijvers 2011, 176 no. 28 (I thank G. Benedetto for the information and the translation of the passage from the Dutch).

169 See coins no. 7 and no. 10 in the numismatic note.

170 For the translation and the interpretation of the funerary epitaph in Samaritan Hebrew, see: Saller 1941, 271–275; Bagatti 1965, 1129–1132; Yonick 1967, 162–221; Hüttenmeister – Reeg 1977, 656–667; Di Segni 1998, 464.

171 Deut. 34, 10; Psalm 90, 1.

172 A particularly interesting essay on the imitation of the figure of Moses by the Bishop Peter the Iberian is given by B. Bitton-Ashkelony and A. Kofsky. Specific references appear in it to the text by John Rufus and bibliographic indications on the Jewish tradition of the death of Moses and on the story of the discovery of the prophet's

the precise identification of the burial place of the prophet[173]. Lastly, what Z. T. Fiema, resuming the studies of L. Di Segni[174] says, on the monastery of Aaron on Jabal Haroun near Petra, which is a precise comparison with the Nebo complex[175] is of particular interest:

> «*Christianization could proceed through* inventio *– the miraculous finds, following a vision or dream, of tombs that preserved bodies of persons associated with the biblical tradition and/or the early Christian Church, which would then become a place of pilgrimage and the logical spot for the construction of a Christian edifice. Although* inventio *was not restricted to the association of a burial with a church to be built, many early churches were erected on holy places known in the Jewish and Christian tradition, which often contained very ancient tombs. In some cases, an ancient tomb is connected to a monastic church, either because of a local tradition identifying the tomb as that of some venerated figure or for practical reasons*»[176]

In this cultural and religious horizon, building a tomb dedicated to Moses, in the basilica, which was already an important place of Christian pilgrimage, should therefore not be understood as an isolated case.

1.2.2 The phase of partial rebuilding with the addition of the *cella trichora* (late 5th – early 6th cent. A.D.)

This phase could correspond with the restoration of the internal mosaic pavement shown by fragments SU31, SU35 and SU36, in relation with one another because they were found at the same level (−19). The presence of two tubs for washing SU40 and SU41, at different levels, would be a further clue of the new mosaic. The reason that probably led to restoring the pavement had to be connected with the replacement of the presumed pilasters with columns resting on independent foundations. Evidence of this are the small mosaic fragment SU31 which rests on the base of the column and the pottery found there. At the same level (−19) there is also the isolated mosaic fragment in the centre of the nave[177] (Fig. 70). The greatest modification of this phase consists of building a *cella trichora* at the eastern end of the previous complex. The three funerary rooms to the east were sealed up by obtaining a portion of nave with the addition of four columns. The slight divergence of axis of the three apses with respect to the basilica and the masonry of the cell resting on the perimeter walls of the three earlier rooms[178] are clear signs of subsequent building. The cell, with a square external perimeter and three internal apses, was formed as the *bema* of the basilica, keeping a funerary function expressed by the three-apse architecture, fairly common in the Egyptian regional context[179]. The layers SU6, SU5, SU4 and SU3, under the *synthronon*, returned pottery sherds (Pls. 3–8) and coins[180] which allow dating the edification of the apse steps to the building of the three apses. The pottery (Pl. 16) and the coins found in the layers of the central tombs of the presbytery are of the

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tomb. Bitton-Ashkelony – Kofsky 2006b, 62–81, in particular note 57 for the traditions on the death of Moses and also Tromp 1993, 115–123. See also Manns 1998, 65–69.

173 Bitton-Ashkelony – Kofsky 2006b, 64–65. See also Satran 1995, 97–105.

174 Di Segni 2006–2007, 381–401.

175 I wish to thank Z. T. Fiema for the useful indications and for providing me with the text of his works. See Fiema 2012, 27–38.

176 Fiema 2012, 32.

177 Fragment of mosaic pavement with white tesserae with a decorative band in black tesserae already identified by S. Saller and then by M. Piccirillo. See in detail Saller 1941, 223–224; Piccirillo 1976, 293; Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 189 no. 82.

178 This element was noticed during the latest excavations in correspondence with the foundation near SU15; the discovery confirms what was already supposed in the studies of E. Alliata and S. Bianchi, see in detail Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 153.

179 In this regard see at least Grossmann 1999, 216–236 and the more recent Grossmann 2007, 103–136.

180 See coins nos. 4. 15. 16. 17. 18 in the numismatic note.

same chronological horizon, late 5th – early 6th cent. A.D.[181], like other coins found under the preparation of the mosaic during the previous excavations[182]; these elements ascribed to the same phase both the burial in the centre of the *cella trichora*[183], and that which cuts the wall in bossage[184]. The mosaic pavement of the *cella trichora*, found *in situ*[185], the dating of which on an iconographic basis[186] is prior to the Justinian flourishing of the mosaic school of Madaba, seals the tomb structures and rests on the first row of steps for the clergy to sit on (Fig. 81).

1.2.3 The phase of rebuilding the basilica (late 6th cent. A.D.)

In the third phase the basilica was completely rebuilt, now with a new *diakonikon* north of the central nave[187] and two other rectangular rooms in the southern area[188] (Fig. 82). Chronologically the restoration in the nave can be ascribed to the end of the 6th cent. A.D., – i.e. after the building of the northern baptistery (dated to A.D. 530) but before the southern one (A.D. 597)[189] – as shown by the pottery found in SU19, under the preparation of the mosaic of the wild beast[190] (Pl. 17).

The restoration covered the rebuilding of the walls of the nave, with accesses to the new northern and southern areas, and the rebuilding of the *cella trichora*. The heterogeneity of the stones in the consistency of the walls, including in depth, in the foundation of the apse and layer SU7, which cuts vertically through all the previous layers are therefore the sign of its total reconstruction. The pottery found in this layer dates to the middle of the 6th cent. A.D. (Pls. 9–10). The steps of the clergy were spared from this renovation.

Lastly, the edification of the southern baptistery occurred under the patronage of the Bishop Sergius of Madaba and of the presbyter and hegumen Martyrius in A.D. 597[191] and of the Theotokos chapel by Bishop Leontius of Madaba and the presbyters and hegumens Martyrius and Theorodus in A.D. 604–608[192].

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181 See coin no. 13 in the numismatic note.

182 Gitler 1998, 555–556 nos. 3. 5. 9. 35. 36. 48. 53.

183 Tomb no. 70 placed in the centre of the *cella trichora*, found already violated during the excavations by S. Saller, was again investigated during the latest archaeological investigations. See Saller 1941, 36; Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 189 no. 70.

184 Tomb placed south-east of the previous burial place near the balustrade of the *cella trichora*. During the 1993 excavation, coins from the 4th and 5th centuries were found, including two minted in the time of the Emperor Arcadius (A.D. 395–408). Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 189 no. 71.

185 Polychromatic mosaic pavement plan with a quadrilobate shape including geometric and figurative motifs. One of the descriptions in the mosaic mentions the name of the presbyter Alex(ios) which also appears in the mosaic found under the subsequent southern baptistery. From the excavation under the mosaic come 4th and 5th cent. coins of which those with the most recent date belong to the first phase of the reign of the Emperor Theodosius II (A.D. 402–408), see Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 186 no. 34.

186 For the detailed iconographic study, see Piccirillo 1998c, 270–273.

187 During these works, the funerary chapel and the previous baptistery were closed and the pavement level of the new room raised to the same level as that of the nave. The new chapel was divided into two parts separated by steps with a balustrade. The western part was decorated with a geometric motif closed in a braid in which a flower and a leaf alternate; the eastern one with lobate squares decorated with geometric motifs, bunches of grapes, birds and fish. For a more analytical interpretation of the part, see Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 168–171.

188 Wall structure with an east-west trend made up of medium-sized blocks of *nary* stone, regularly squared off. It was used as a southern perimeter of the complex, see Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 174. 182 no. 1/1.

189 Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 176.

190 Saller 1941, 50. 219; Corbo 1970, 281–283 fig. 5; Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 189 no. 78.

191 The original funerary chapel was destroyed and replaced by a new room with a mosaic which, recovered, left its place in turn for the new baptistery. The quadrilobate font was placed in the splay of the apse divided from the hall of the chapel by a balustrade. Access to the chapel was originally allowed through a second door on the north wall and a third opening in the western wall. More in detail, see Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 176–177.

192 In the first decade of the 7th cent., the western door of the baptistery was walled up and three rooms of the monastery were destroyed; furthermore, the apsidal chapel was built on the area brought to the same level as the basilica and divided into two distinct parts by a balustrade. See Alliata – Bianchi 1998, 178–179.

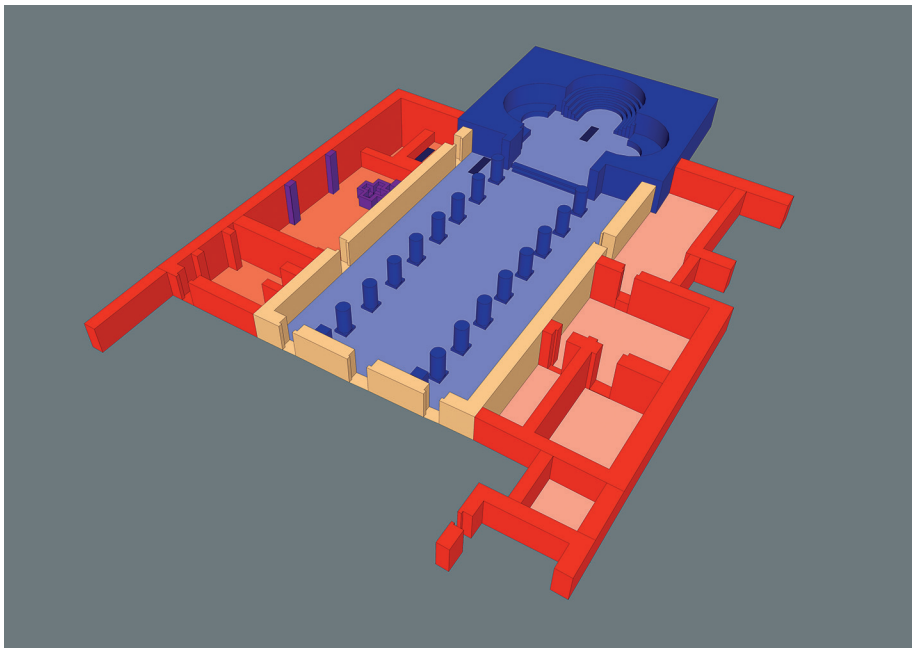

Fig. 81 Memorial of Moses. The phase of partial restoration with the addition of the *cella trichora* (end of 5th – beginning of 6th cent. A.D.) (3D reconstruction by the author).

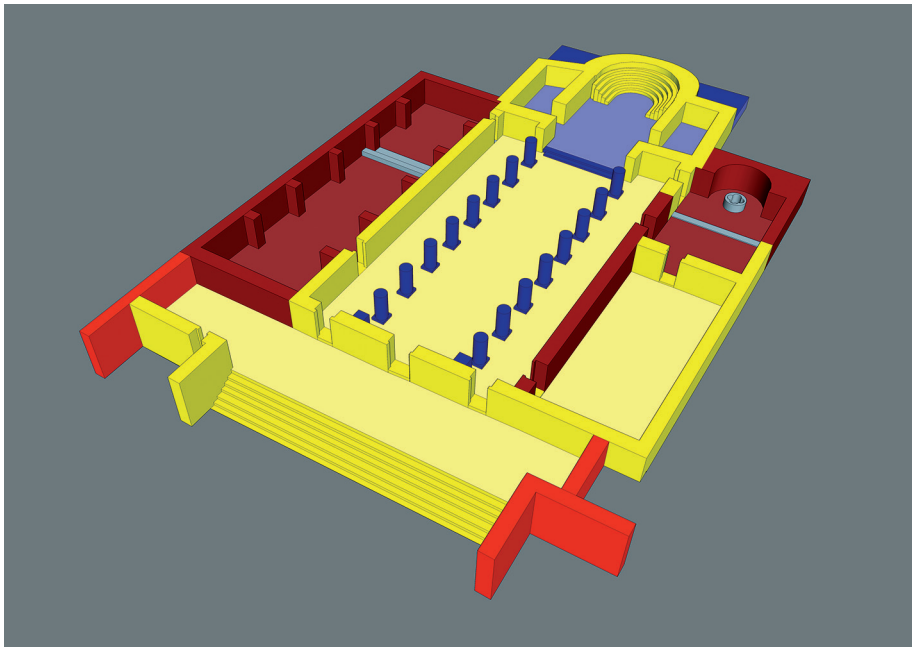

Fig. 82 Memorial of Moses. The phase of rebuilding the Basilica (late 6th cent. A.D.) (3D reconstruction by the author).

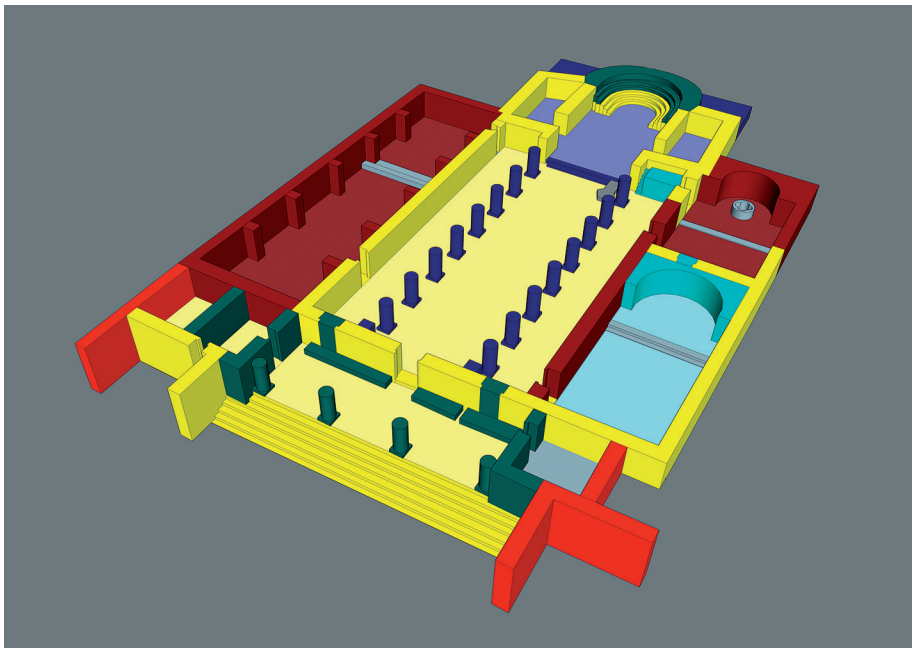

Fig. 83 Memorial of Moses. Umayyad phase with the partial restoration of the *synthronon* (middle of the 8th cent., after the earthquake of A.D. 749) (3D reconstruction by the author).

1.2.4 The Umayyad phase with the partial rebuilding of the *synthronon* (mid-8th cent., after the earthquake in A.D. 749)

The rebuilding of the last two rows of the *synthronon* and of the apse masonry from the corresponding level is attributed to the last phase. The large pottery sherds, the pieces of the marble *pluteum* and the base of the column found in layer SU2 (Figs. 21, 27–29; Pls. 1–2) as well as the disorderly arrangement of the stones near the apse in SU9 (Figs. 36–37) are the sign of rebuilding following destruction caused by a catastrophic event, probably to be traced back to the well-known earthquake which affected these areas in A.D. 749 (Fig. 83)[193]. The structural static and the vicinity to the slope of the mountain certainly affected the stability of the structure of the apse. The dating proposed sees in this event the *terminus post quem* for the reconstruction of the apse which therefore must have taken place shortly afterwards. The pottery is part of the usual Umayyad production of the first half of the 7th cent., while the later forms of Abbasid context are absent (Pls. 1–2). The coin found in SU2 does not provide certain chronological data, except that it was an Arab mint. The closure of the door of access to the two lateral naves, perhaps to limit access to the sacred place by possible invaders, can also be ascribed to this phase.

[193] For a recent re-examination of the dating of the earthquake, see Tsafrir 2014, 111–120.

1.3 STRATIGRAPHIC REPERTOIRE OF THE EXCAVATION AREAS

The list of the stratigraphic units identified during the excavation is presented here in a table, which acts as a point of reference in the study of the material found, especially pottery and coins.

Area 1: survey under the *synthronon* and in the apse of the *cella trichora*	
SU1	*Synthronon*. Superficial modern soils
SU2	*Synthronon*. Layer comprised between the second row and the base of *neby musa* column
SU3	*Synthronon*. Layer comprised between the *neby musa* column to the pavement level on which the first row of seats rests
SU4	*Synthronon*. Compact yellow layer on which the foundation of the *synthronon* rests up to the "black-soil layer"
SU5	*Synthronon*. Strongly anthropized layer already identified by V. Corbo who defined it a "black-soil layer". Comprised between the two yellow layers
SU6	*Synthronon*. Yellow layer comprised between the "black-soil layer" and the rocky level of the mountain
SU7	*Synthronon*. Cut of foundation of the apse
SU8	North-east corner block. Series of blocks of rock placed in correspondence with the external perimeter
SU9	North-eastern corner block. Indistinct agglomerate of stones in correspondence with the apse

Area 2: survey of "unexcavated soil" west of tomb no. 70	
SU10	Superficial layer collected during the phases of initial cleaning with ancient material
SU11	Covering layer near the masonry of the tomb
SU13	Limestone layer
SU14	From the ground level in limestone to the rock of the mountain

Area 3: survey in the area of access to the *cella trichora* and to the three tombs (nos. 72–74)	
SU15	Fragment of the white mosaic reported by V. Corbo under the steps of the presbytery
SU16	Soft black layer in the southern portion of the assay between the wall in bossage and the steps of the presbytery. Comprised between the tuff rock and the subsequent modern filling
SU17	Layer in the northern portion of the assay between the wall in bossage and the steps of the presbytery. Comprised between the tuff rock and the subsequent modern filling
SU18	Mosaic fragment in the corner between the wall in bossage and the masonry of the *cella trichora*
SU19	Layer under the ambo comprised between the level of the mosaic of the wild beast and the rock of the mountain
SU20	Southern layer of the assay under the ambo
SU21	Assay under the three tombs and the western wall, layer comprised between the cement pavement and the rock
SU22	Mosaic fragment which faces the tomb no. 71 in correspondence with the steps of access to the presbytery

Area 4: survey in the central nave and in the northern intercolumns	
SU23	Central nave, fine preparatory layer of the mosaic of the central nave comprised between the tuff level of the mountain and the modern cement covering
SU24	Central nave. Tomb along the axis
SU25	Central nave. Layer of dark soil in the south-western corner of the burial place
SU26	Third intercolumn starting from the presbytery. Layer comprised between the modern cement and the tuff rock/filling foundation third column
SU27	Fourth intercolumn starting from the presbytery. Layer comprised between the modern cement and the tuff rock/filling foundation fourth column
SU28	Fifth intercolumn starting from the presbytery. Layer comprised between the modern cement and the tuff rock/filling foundation fifth column
SU29	Sixth intercolumn starting from the presbyter. Layer comprised between the modern cement and the tuff rock/filling foundation sixth foundation sixth column

	Area 5: survey in the area of the façade of the basilica
SU30	Fragment of mosaic in correspondence with the threshold of access of the southern nave at level
SU31	Row of white tesserae in correspondence with the eighth southern column of the nave
SU32	Threshold of the door of access to the southern nave
SU33	Foundation of the south door comprised between the threshold and the rock
SU34	Threshold of the door of access to the north nave
SU35	Probable restoration of the mosaic with small white tesserae in correspondence with the north door at level −19
SU36	Mosaic fragment with large white tesserae arranged near the north door at level −19
SU37	Mosaic fragment with white tesserae with diagonal pattern of the north door at level −22
SU38	Threshold of the central door
SU39	Mosaic fragment with white tesserae at level −24
SU40	Mosaic tub at level −48
SU41	Mosaic tub at level −36

1.4 NUMISMATIC NOTE

The study of the coins found during the excavation was carried out by B. Callegher. Here the synthetic data related to the dating of the coins are presented (Pls. 45–46). For further information, see his article[194].

SU2 – *Synthronon*	
no. 24	Undetermined authority – Umayyad or Abbasid period (8th–13th cent.)

SU3 – *Synthronon*	
no. 3	Valentinian II (A.D. 388–392)
no. 9	Undetermined mint
no. 14	Undetermined authority (4th–5th cent. A.D.)

SU4 – *Synthronon*	
no. 4	Valentinian II (A.D. 388–392)

SU5 – *Synthronon*	
no. 15	Undetermined authority (4th–5th cent. A.D.)
no. 16	Undetermined authority (4th–5th cent. A.D.)
no. 17	Undetermined authority (4th–5th cent. A.D.)
no. 18	Undetermined authority (4th–5th cent. A.D.)

SU7 – *Synthronon*	
no. 12	Undetermined authority. Imitation of the "*salus reipublicae*" type (end 4th– beginning 5th cent. A.D.)
no. 19	Undetermined authority (4th–5th cent. A.D.)
no. 20	Undetermined authority (4th–5th cent. A.D.)
no. 21	Undetermined authority (4th–5th cent. A.D.)

SU8 – *Trichora*, north-east corner blockage	
no. 2	Aelia Flacilla under Theodosius I (A.D. 383–388)
no. 23	Undetermined authority (A.D. 4th–5th cent.)

SU14 – Survey to the west of tomb no. 70 (in the centre of the presbytery)	
no. 13	Undetermined authority (4th–5th cent. A.D.)

SU16 – Survey of foundation of presbytery step	
no. 8	Theodosius II, Valentinian III (A.D. 425–435)

SU19 – Survey under the base of the ambo	
no. 11	Undetermined authority. Imitation type "cross" without legend (second half of 5th cent. A.D.)

[194] The numbers refer to the article by B. Callegher (Callegher 2020, 71–80).

SU21 – Survey under the three tombs and the western wall	
no. 5	Valentinianus II, Theodosius I, Arcadius, Honorius, Johannes (A.D. 383–425)
no. 22	Undetermined authority (4th–5th cent. A.D.)

SU23 – Survey of central nave, in the preparation of the mosaic	
no. 1	Iulianus Caesar under Constantius II (A.D. 355–361)
no. 6	Undetermined mint and authority. Type: *salus reipublicae*.2 (4th–5th cent. A.D.)
no. 7	Arcadius, Honorius, Theodosius II (A.D. 406–408)
no. 10	Undetermined authority: Theodosius II? (A.D. 408–423)

Fig. 84 Memorial of Moses. Inscribed marble fragments found in the excavation of the *synthronon.*

1.5 INSCRIPTIONS

The excavation of the *synthronon* provided two further marble fragments[195] with inscriptions of Greek capital letters which allow the completion of an already-published inscription[196]. The piece TS-12-II-29 joined with another identified in S. Saller's excavation[197] completes the *Mi* and adds two other letters which suggest reading the term Μαξ[ίμου] (Fig. 84; Pl. 13, no.7). The inscription on fragment TS-12-II-28 has the three letters ουδ (Pl. 13, no.7). A new interpretation is thus proposed[198]:

+ Προσφο[ρὰ ---] ου πρε[σβ](υτέρου) καὶ Μαξ[ίμου] --- [σπ]ουδ[ῆ]? ---

+ Offer by … priest and by Maximus …

The epigraphic contribution found thus consists of the addition of the proper name of the second dedicant of the marble *pluteum*. The recurrences of the name Μάξιμος, transliteration of the Latin surname *Maximus*[199], are fairly common in the three provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia*, in particular in the Hawran[200]. Specifically for the Transjordan area, the spread of the name in Rihab[201], in the mosaic pavement of the church of St Cyrus in El-Quweisme (south-east of Amman)[202] and in the region around Mount Nebo in the mosaic inscription in the third northern intercolumn of the church of 'Uyun Musa dated to the 4th cent. A.D. should be mentioned[203].

A prudent interpretation of the last term is also offered which could coincide with the Greek term σπουδῆ due to its fairly common recurrence in the dedicatory inscriptions in the region[204]. The lack of other fragments does not allow a more exhaustive reading.

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195 For the analytic description of the pieces, see below in the catalogue 91.

196 The epigraphic reading of the inscription appears in Saller 1941, 268–269; Gatier 1986, 96 no. 85, pl. XIX, 69; Di Segni 1998, 435 no. 17; Acconci 1998, 525–527 no. 150.

197 Saller 1941, 289–290 no. XVI.

198 The first part of the inscription agrees with what L. Di Segni argues, but the finding of the new fragments allows the terms μοναχοῦ and μονάζοντος to be excluded. See Di Segni 1998, 435 no. 17.

199 For an in-depth study, see Kajano 1965, 30. 71–72.

200 For a pertinent bibliography, see Sartre 1985, 214–215; Sartre-Fauriat 2001 vol. I, 90–92 nos. 1–2; 96–97 no. 1; 249–250 no. 5; Di Segni 1997, 206. 259 no. 19; Meimaris – Kritikakou-Nikolaropolou 2005, 145–146 no. 51 with an extensive bibliography.

201 Gatier 1998, 399–400 no. 105; 403 no. 118; 404, no. 123.

202 Gatier 1986, no. 54c; Piccirillo 1984b, 329–340; Meimaris 1986, 149 no. 771; 192 no. 958.

203 Piccirillo 1984a, 309–310 no. 1; pl. 24,5; Piccirillo 1988, 199 fig. 1; SEG 34 1984, no. 1510, Gatier 1986, 100 no. 96; Piccirillo 1989a, 210 no. 6; Di Segni 1998, 456 no. 67.

204 In particular, for the occurrences in the region of Madaba, see Piccirillo 1989a 47. 74. 106. 156. 164. 192. 214. 245. 280. 292. 310.

1.6 CATALOGUE OF FINDS

The catalogue brings together the list of archaeological finds from the excavations. The objects are divided into different groups depending on the different areas of excavation studied. For each layer, first the pottery finds are presented in order, starting with the closed shapes, then the open shapes, and lastly the special shapes. The examination of the pottery fragments concerned the visual inspection relative to the macroscopic data of the fabrics and the morphology of the vessels without using an archeometric study which is referred to elsewhere. The terminology of classification, coherently with the previous publications on Mount Nebo, has followed the model used by E. Alliata and C. Pappalardo which shows the fabric, the colour of the fragment, and any decoration. These are followed by the lithic, metallic and vitreous materials. The abbreviation is made up of the abbreviation of the area, the year of excavation, the number of the layer and that of the find. Each individual stratigraphic unit is accompanied by a short reference, on its origin and composition, and by the reference to the relative graphic plates at the end of the volume. The progressive number which precedes the abbreviation of each find corresponds to its figure in the plates of drawings.

1.6.1 Area 1: survey under the *synthronon* and in the apse of the *cella trichora* (TS-12)

Synthronon (TS-12)

SU2 Origin: memorial of Moses; presbyter: TS II soil "above the column" *(Pls. 1–2)*

The context of this group of objects, including pottery, marble, glass, wood and many tesserae of mosaic is that of a work of restoration which entailed the rebuilding of the steps of the *synthronon* and probably also of the apse masonry starting from the corresponding level. Umayyad painted pottery is attested only in this layer and can be dated with certainty to the middle of the 8th cent. A.D.[205]. Chronologically, it is possible to situate this phase shortly after the earthquake of A.D. 749. The only coin found is a round piece of copper cut into an octagonal shape, in a poor state of preservation, which can be generically dated to the first Islamic period[206].

1. TS-12-II-05. Amphora. Fine fabric; colour: grey; medium firing. Decoration: beige slip on the outer surface.
2. TS-12-II-11. Amphora. Fine mix fabric; colour: grey; strong firing.
3. TS-12-II-03. Amphora wall. Fine fabric; colour: red; beige slip; strong firing. Decoration: comb-like incisions.
4. TS-12-II-06. Pot. Fine fabric; colour: pink; external red slip; medium firing.
5. TS-12-II-08. Jug. Fine fabric; colour: grey; light grey slip; strong firing.
6. TS-12-II-09. Bottom of oil lamp, with double ring base. Fine fabric; colour: pink; strong firing.
7. TS-12-II-01. Plate. Fairly fine fabric; Diam. 28 cm; colour: red; medium firing. Decoration: polished inside.
8. TS-12-II-16. Amphora wall. Fine fabric; colour: pink; external beige slip; medium firing. Decoration: dark red paint with circular patterns.
9. TS-12-II-17. Amphora wall. Fine fabric; colour: pink; beige slip; medium firing. Decoration: painted lines which cross one another and concentric circles in scarlet red. The upper breakage appears to have been done deliberately (not caused by normal breakage), perhaps to use the amphora as an open vessel.
10. TS-12-II-12. Amphora wall. Fine fabric; colour: pink; external beige slip; medium firing. Decoration: red paint.

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205 Schneider 1950, figs. 2, 2. 2, 4 for Mount Nebo, but not following the author in the dating; Arndt 2004, fig. 3; McNicoll *et al.* 1982, pl. 143, 1, for Pella; Alliata 1991, fig. 15, 1 for Umm er-Rasas; Daviau – Beckmann 2001, 262, for the state of the question.

206 See coin no. 22 in the numismatic note.

11. TS-12-II-14. Amphora wall. Fine fabric; colour: grey; beige slip; strong firing. Decoration: dark red painting of bands.

12. TS-12-II-15. Amphora wall. Fine fabric; colour: pink; external beige slip; medium firing. Decoration: scarlet red painted lines that cross one another.

13. TS-12-II-22. Pot. Granular fabric; colour: red; external grey slip; medium firing. Abundant trances of fire. The vase has been graphically and completely reconstructed starting from three pieces that did not correspond with one another but which partially overlapped. Another complete specimen was found, also in an Umayyad context, in the excavation of the eastern sector of the monastery (Alliata 1990, no. 30).

SU3 Origin: Memorial of Moses; presbytery: TS III "soil under the column" *(Pl. 3)*

The point of reference for the change of layer refers to the position of a small "column", or fragment of it, placed at the level of the first step of the *synthronon*, with which the material of the Umayyad era ended and that of the Byzantine period started. In particular, the frequent presence of parts of pottery torch, recognizable in the foot for the less careful working of the inner part and in the upper receptacle due to the presence of traces of internal burning, begins to be apparent. These elements, when present, are used to distinguish that form from other similar ones like bowls and jugs. Chronologically, the material refers to the period when the *synthronon* was built, probably at the beginning of the 6th cent. The latest of the three coins found is dated between A.D. 425 and 435[207].

1. TS-12-III-05. Vase. Large but with fairly fine walls. Very fine fabric; colour: pink, red externally; medium firing. Decoration: a marked line near the rim. Appearance similar to sealed earth.

2. TS-12-III-14. Bowl. Fine fabric; colour: pink, black in cross-section; strong firing. Traces of burns.

3. TS-12-III-01. Bowl. Granular fabric; colour: pink, grey in cross-section; strong firing.

4. TS-12-III-19. Basin. Fine fabric; colour: pink, grey in cross-section; strong firing.

5. TS-12-III-10. Torch foot. Fine fabric; colour: pink; strong firing.

6. TS-12-III-06. Torch foot. Fine fabric; colour: pink; external red-violet slip; strong firing.

7. TS-12-III-09. Plate. Fine fabric; colour: pink, red externally; strong firing.

8. TS-12-III-13. Base of oil lamp. Fine fabric; colour: grey; strong firing.

SU4 Origin: Memorial of Moses; presbytery: TS IV yellow soil - first layer *(Pl. 4)*

Yellow soil on which the foundation of the *synthronon* rests. The pottery collected includes a prevalence of cups and a small fragment of one oil lamp decorated with a fabric of various designs on the shoulders. The chronological horizon is the same as the upper layer. The only coin collected, of Valentinian II (A.D. 383–392), would seem to be found out of context[208].

1. TS-12-IV-15. Portion of rim of a small jug. Very fine fabric; colour: red; medium firing. Working of the pottery very similar to the Nabataean one.

2. TS-12-IV-23. Small portion of rim of a jug with spout. Fine fabric; colour: pink; violet-red slip; medium firing[209].

3. TS-12-IV-02. Pot. Fine fabric; colour: pink; medium firing.

4. TS-12-IV-21. Globular cup (?). Fine fabric; colour: red; external white slip; medium firing.

5. TS-12-IV-10. Cup. Fine fabric; colour: pink; medium firing. Red painting inside.

6. TS-12-IV-16. Cup. Fine fabric; colour: pink; medium firing.

7. TS-12-IV-03. Cup. Fine fabric; colour: pink, grey in cross-section; strong firing.

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207 See coins nos. 2. 8. 13 in the numismatic note.

208 See coin no. 3 in the numismatic note.

209 Alliata 1988, figs. 11, 6. 12, 4. Fabric, slip and shape characteristic of the pottery found in the levels under the mosaics of the 6th cent. A.D.

8. TS-12-IV-01. Cup. Granular fabric; colour: pink; strong firing.

9. TS-12-IV-13. Torch. Fine fabric; colour: beige; medium firing. Abundant traces of burning inside and on the rim.

10. Clay censer. Fine fabric; colour: pink; strong firing. Remainder of decorative incision in the upper part and presence of a hole in the lower part. Traces of burning inside.

11. TS-12-IV-17. Oil lamp. Fine fabric; colour: beige; medium firing. Decoration: various small marks (crosses, circles, palms) arranged slightly casually. Here, as in the other layers, it can be deemed prior to the second half of the 6th cent. (TS-12-VII no. 24; TI-13 no. 8)[210].

SU5 Origin: Memorial of Moses; presbytery: TS V black-soil layer *(Pls. 5–7)*

This black-soil layer corresponds to the one already identified by V. Corbo and of which the pottery was presented by B. Bagatti[211]. However, in the light of the new excavations, the dating of the finds of the layer (together with those already published) can be situated between the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th cent. A.D. The various coins found do not offer any indication except the vague one of belonging to the 4th–5th centuries[212].

1. TS-12-V-92. Dolium wall. Very fine fabric; colour: red; light-coloured slip; strong firing. Decoration: remains of pinkish paint and the two Greek letters "EX".

2. TS-12-V-40. Clay bath with a fairly large diameter (about 100 cm). Fine fabric; colour: pink, grey in cross-section; external beige slip; medium firing. Decoration: series of three deep undulated horizontal incisions just under the rim. The inner wall has numerous residues of limestone. A second fragment (TS-12-VII-64) is joined with the first one.

3. TS-12-V-79. Amphora. Fine fabric; colour: pink, grey in cross-section; strong firing.

4. TS-12-V-02. Amphora. Fine fabric; colour: grey; external lighter grey slip; strong firing.

5. TS-12-V-38. Small jug (?). Very fine fabric; colour: pink; external red slip; medium firing.

6. TS-12-V-13. Pot. Very fine fabric; colour: beige; external black slip; medium firing.

7. TS-12-V-17. Pot. Fine fabric; colour: beige; external red slip; medium firing.

8. TS-12-V-85. Pot. Very fine fabric; colour: beige; external, brown slip; medium firing.

9. TS-12-V-61. Pan. Fine fabric; colour: pink; external violet-red slip; medium firing. Horizontal "bent" handle.

10. TS-12-V-60. Pan. Fine fabric; colour: beige; external red slip; medium firing.

11. TS-12-V-18. Lid. Fine fabric; colour: pink; external red slip; medium firing. Various other fragments (TS-12-V-82 and TS-12-V-76) belong to the same lid, allowing its complete graphic reconstruction.

12. TS-12-V-27. Plate. Very fine fabric; colour: red; strong firing.

13. TS-12-V-74. Plate. Very fine fabric; colour: red; strong firing.

14. TS-12-V-05. Cup. Granular fabric; colour: grey; external beige slip that detaches easily; strong firing.

15. TS-12-V-80. Cup. Fine fabric; colour: pink; external beige slip; strong firing.

16. TS-12-V-28. Cup. Fine fabric; colour: red; medium firing. Decoration: internal and external blacking slip near rim.

17. TS-12-V-46. Cup. Very fine fabric; colour: pink; internal red slip; medium firing.

18. TS-12-V-32. Cup. Fine fabric; colour: pink; strong firing. Decoration: external and internal black slip near the rim.

19. TS-12-V-29. Cup. Fine fabric; colour: grey; external beige slip; strong firing.

20. TS-12-V-70. Base of plate. Fine fabric; colour: red; strong firing. Decoration: there is a rosette print on the base[213].

21. TS-12-V-19. Cup. Very fine fabric; colour: grey; strong firing.

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210 As at Khirbet el-Mukhayyat, see Alliata 1988, 359.

211 Corbo 1970, 276; Bagatti 1985, 252–253, fig. 1.

212 See coins nos. 14. 15. 16. 17 in the numismatic note.

213 Bagatti 1985, fig. 1, 4.

22. TS-12-V-87. Torch. Fine fabric; colour: brown, grey in cross-section; medium firing. The internal surface shows countless signs of blackening. There are, as in SU7, (nos. 18–21), also a considerable number of fragments of torch recognizable by the extensive traces of burning on the inner wall of the vase. The fragments belong more often to the part of the vase corresponding to the rim, but also to the shaft foot. A complete specimen was found at Mount Nebo in the 1970s[214]. Open vases specifically interpreted as a torch were also identified in Capernaum, which S. Loffreda classifies according to their shape "like a lid" or "like a pan"[215]. Those of Mount Nebo fall under the "cup" and "bowl" type[216].

23. TS-12-V-12. Central part of torch. Fine fabric; colour: grey; strong firing. Signs of blackening due to fire both externally and internally.

24. TS-12-V-47. Small part of the shaft of a torch. Fine fabric; colour: pink, grey in cross-section; strong firing. Several other fragments from the same part of the vase have been collected but, not joining the receptacle at the top or the foot at the bottom, or with one another, and not having particular connotations, they are not shown here. This piece has a series of horizontal ring incisions and has some traces of burning externally.

25. TS-12-V-20. Torch. Very fine fabric; colour: pink; light-coloured slip; strong firing. Note the high relief in shaping the walls which appears to be characteristic of most of these vases.

26. TS-12-V-25. Torch. Rather granular fabric; colour: beige; lighter beige external slip; strong firing.

SU6 Origin: Memorial of Moses; presbytery: TS VI yellow soil second layer *(Pl. 8)*

This layer can be considered as the base layer, prior to any building activity. Only very small fragments of vases were collected in it. The fine thickness of the walls, the light-coloured fabric covered with red or grey slip are attributed to the late Roman period: end of the 4th or beginning of the 5th centuries. The only exception is a large shard from the Iron Age.

1. TS-12-VI-2. Pot. Fine fabric; colour: pink, red exterior; medium firing.

2. TS-12-VI-6. Pot. Fine fabric; colour: pink, beige in cross-section; medium firing.

3. TS-12-VI-13. Pan. Very fine fabric; colour: beige; external grey slip; medium firing. Horizontal "bent" handle.

4. TS-12-VI-3. Basin. Very fine fabric; colour: beige, grey-violet internally; strong firing.

5. TS-12-VI-9. Basin. Fine fabric; colour: beige; external red slip; medium firing.

6. TS-12-VI-11. Cup. Slightly granular fabric; colour: pink, grey in cross-section; strong firing.

7. TS-12-VI-8. Cup. Fine fabric; Diam. 9.8 cm. colour: grey; strong firing.

8. TS-12-VI-1. Amphora wall (?). Fine fabric, colour: pink, medium firing. Decoration on the outer side done with a comb, with horizontal and undulating lines.

9. TS-12-VI-5. Base of jug. Fine fabric; colour: beige, grey externally; medium firing.

10. TS-12-VI-15. Base of krater (?). Granular fabric; colour: pink; black in cross-section; medium firing. Rare fragment (for Siyagha) of the Iron Age[217].

SU7 Origin: Memorial of Moses; presbytery: TS VII trench cut of apse foundation *(Pls. 9–10)*

This set contains a certain vagueness as the filling soil of the foundation trench of the apse consists to a great extent of the soil of the layers which were cut. Umayyad pottery is absent. The layers cut contain Byzantine pottery and presumably belong to the first construction of the *cella trichora*.

1. TS-12-VII-06. Amphora. Fine fabric; colour: pink, grey in cross-section; strong firing.

2. TS-12-VII-10. Amphora wall. Fine fabric; colour: red; external black slip; very strong firing. Decoration: white painted horizontal line.

214 Bagatti 1985, fig. 9, 4; photo 4.
215 Loffreda 2008, types Luc 11–12, 82–83.
216 Alliata 1988, fig. 8, 36.
217 Amiran 1970, pl. 64, 24 (krater) or 84, 3 (jug).

3. TS-12-VII-07. Amphora wall. Fine fabric; colour: red; with nuances towards grey; very strong firing. Decoration: two comb undulated incisions which partially overlap.

4. TS-12-VII-24. Pot. Fine fabric; colour: pink; external grey-violet slip; medium firing.

5. TS-12-VII-03. Lid handle (knob) Fine fabric; colour: pink; medium firing.

6. TS-12-VII-01. Cup. Rather granular fabric; colour: red, grey in cross-section; beige near the rim; strong firing.

7. TS-12-VII-39. Cup. Granular fabric; colour: beige; medium firing.

8. TS-12-VII-44. Jug. Granular fabric; colour: grey; strong firing.

9. TS-12-VII-48. Small jug (?). Fine fabric; colour: red; dark red slip; medium firing.

10. TS-12-VII-69. Large open vase. Granular fabric; Diam. 57 cm. colour: pink; hand worked.

11. TS-12-VII-18. Basin. Granular and porous fabric; Diam. 44 cm. colour: greenish; medium firing.

12. TS-12-VII-20. Plate. Fine fabric; Diam. 40 cm. colour: pink; beige slip on rim; strong firing.

13. TS-12-VII-27. Basin. Fine fabric; Diam. 28 cm. colour: pink; external grey slip; medium firing.

14. TS-12-VII-49. Basin. Fine fabric; colour: red, grey in cross-section; beige slip on rim; very strong firing.

15. TS-12-VII-04. Plate. Rather fine fabric; colour: red, grey in cross-section; beige at rim; strong firing.

16. TS-12-VII-41. Plate. Fine fabric; colour: pink; medium firing.

17. TS-12-VII-73. Cup. Granular fabric; colour: beige, grey in cross-section; strong firing.

18. TS-12-VII-35. Torch. Fine fabric; colour: pink; medium firing. With abundant signs of burning.

19. TS-12-VII-33. Fragment decorated with palm of a torch. Fine fabric; colour: beige; medium firing. Traces of burning inside.

20. TS-12-VII-31. Torch. Fine fabric; colour: beige; medium firing. Traces of burning inside. It is joined with another fragment (TS-12-VII-57).

21. TS-12-VII-42. Torch. Fine fabric; colour: beige; medium firing. Abundant traces of burning inside.

22. TS-12-VII-54. Torch. Fine fabric; colour: beige; medium firing. Abundant traces of use.

23. TS-12-VII-67. Bottom of torch. Fine fabric; colour: pink, grey in cross-section; strong firing.

24. TS-12-VII-71. Oil lamp. Fine fabric; colour: red; medium firing. Decoration: printed with a series of curls towards the rim and a herring-bone band towards the outside.

25. TS-12-VII-70. Oil lamp, part of shoulders or base (?). Fine fabric; colour: pink; medium firing. Decoration: a small circle in relief.

Miscellaneous Materials

Glass vases *(Pl. 11)*

1. TS-12-V-96c. Rim of glass vessel. Decoration: with a horizontal line in relief on the outside. Vessel deformed or with an irregular shape.

2. TS-12-VII-82. Handle of glass lamp.

3. TS-12-V-96b. Glass handle.

4. TS-12-VII-82a. Base of glass vessel.

5. TS-12-V-96. Base of glass vessel.

6. TS-12-V-96d. Base of glass vessel. Made up of multiple superimposed lines.

Metals and wood *(Pl. 12)*

1. TS-12-II-51. Three iron nails.

2. TE-12-I-8. Two bronze hooks.

3. TS-12-II-47. Bronze chain.

4. TS-12-VII-77 Wood carved in the shape of a half lily.

Marble *(Pl. 13)*

1. TS-12-II-25 Altar table. White marble, very fine, with high-edge moulding[218].

2. TS-12-II-30 Fragment of *pluteum*. Light grey marble with sculpted decoration on the front face; traces of yellow colour on the rear cut.

3. TS-12-II-33. Fragment of *pluteum*. Veined white marble, with decoration of woven leaves. The fragment joins others of the old excavation[219]. The fragment belongs to the group containing the inscription discussed in no. 7. The finding of known fragments in a well-defined context (Umayyad reconstruction of the *synthronon*, and probably of the apse as well) establishes that the *pluteum* was used in the Byzantine church, but no longer in the one rebuilt in the Umayyad period.

4. TS-12-II-32 *Pluteum*, lateral part. White marble. Yellow colour in the rear cut. Bevelling on the flat side with the aim of helping insert the piece into the corresponding recess in the small pilaster.

5. TS-12-II-40 *Pluteum*, upper part. White veined marble.

6. TS-12-II-27 *Pluteum*. Light grey marble. Traces of yellow in the rear cut. Many other similar pieces were found in the old excavation in places very far apart from one another[220]. The positioning of this very decorative element has been proposed as in the ambo of the church[221]. For the chronology, the same applies as for no. 3.

7. TS-12-II-26, 28, 29 *Pluteum*, upper part. Large grain white marble. Strongly coloured yellow-red in the rear cut. Two show a floral decoration and two have a Greek inscription. The letters appear filled to a good effect with a substance mixed with sparkling gravel or particles[222].

8. TS-12-II-34 *Pluteum*. *Nebi Musa* black stone. Fragment corresponding to others collected in the old excavation of the area of the atrium[223].

9. TS-12-II-41 Lower part of a column, *Nebi Musa* black stone; A horizontal stripe of red paint is present on the lower scape. The diameter of the column of 22 cm recalls many other marble columns of various kinds found in the first excavation, but none is in *Nebi Musa* stone.

Tiles and bricks *(Pl. 14, nos. 5–9)*

The presence of a certain number of fragments of tiles supposes that at the same time repair work was carried out on the roof of the basilica. One of the specimens, recomposed, appears almost whole, at least in its width. Some other edges offer a wide sample of possibilities for this element.

5. TS-12-II-23. Tile. Fine fabric; colour: pink; strong firing. Series of parallel stripes on the rear deriving from the type of material that formed the mould used.

6. TS-12-II-20. Tile. Fairly fine fabric; colour: pink, beige in the upper part; very strong firing.

7. TS-12-II-18. Tile. Fairly fine fabric; colour: pink; strong firing.

8. TS-12-II-21. Small brick (for column?). Granular fabric; colour: pink, black in cross-section; strong firing. On the use of these small bricks in the basilica for the division of windows S. Saller spoke widely as many were found, including piled up and plastered, particularly in the northern nave[224].

9. TS-12-II-19. Tile. Fairly granular fabric; colour: pink; strong firing. Piece restored to a great extent from numerous fragments. Almost the complete width is obtained at one point.

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218 Acconci 1998, nos. 56–58.
219 Saller 1941, 268–269. 289–290, pl. 121, 1; Acconci 1998, no. 150.
220 Saller 1941, 288.
221 Acconci 1998, no. 151.
222 For the epigraphic considerations, see above 85.
223 Saller 1941, 71, pl. 61, 2; Acconci 1998, no. 138.
224 Saller 1941, 64–65, fig. 12.

CLEANING THE BUTTRESS IN THE NORTH-EAST CORNER OF THE *CELLA TRICHORA*

SU9 *(Pl. 15)*

Under two levels of modern cement, there appears a massive block of stone in the interstices of which old soil is deposited containing only a small amount of pottery, where the latest is Umayyad.

1. TB-14-5 Amphora. Fine granular fabric; colour: pink, grey in cross-section, white slip on the external and internal surfaces at the rim; strong firing.

2. TB-14-4 Amphora. Fine fabric; colour: pink, external white slip; strong firing.

3. TB-14-8 Amphora wall decorated with dark red paint in the Umayyad style. Very fine fabric; colour: pink, medium firing.

4. TB-14-9 Small amphora. Fine fabric; colour: pink; external white slip; medium firing. The oval-shaped handle, without ribbing, recalls the Umayyad period.

5. TB-14-7 Plate. Granular fabric; colour: pink, strong firing. The flat bottom was not smoothed.

1.6.2. Area 2: survey of "unexcavated soil" west of the tomb no. 70 (TE-12)

SU10 (material collected on the surface during the phases of initial cleaning)
(Pl. 14, nos. 1–4)

Before reaching the undisturbed layer, many tiles and brinks were found thrown into the filling with which the previous excavation was closed, to the extent of being able to obtain a fairly complete type made up of four types: roof tiles, tiles, rectangular small bricks and polygonal small bricks which are presented in succession.

1. TE-12-3. Roof tile, with a semi-cylindrical body. Slightly granular fabric; colour: pinkish-light brown; interior greyish, externally there is a pink and grey colouring; medium firing; internally there are traces of white lime.

2. TE-12-2. Flat tile. Fine fabric; colour: reddish-light brown; interior greyish; greyish slip; strong firing.

3. TE-12-4. Small brick. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish, interior greyish, light-coloured slip; medium firing; the object is fractured, numerous residues of lime can be seen.

4. TE-12-1. Two superimposed small bricks and united by rather thick mortar. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip; medium firing.

SU11 *(Pl.16, nos. 1–7)*

Near the masonry of the tomb, the soil looked disturbed by the excavation of the tomb and most of the pottery came from this layer, made up of small fragments, all belonging to open shapes, with very fine fabrics and tending to be lighter in colour. These forms certainly belong to some of the oldest Byzantine settlements of Mount Nebo.

1. TE-12-in-3. Pan with bent handle. Fine and homogeneous fabric; colour: light brown, interior greyish; grey slip; strong firing.

2. TE-12-in-11. Basin. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; light-coloured slip; medium firing.

3. TE-12-in-7. Basin. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; light-coloured slip; medium firing. The fragment is made up of two small pieces.

4. TE-12-in-9. Basin. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; reddish slip; medium firing.

5. TE-12-in-16. Plate. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; medium firing. The fragment is made up of two pieces.

6. TE-12-in-2. Cup. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; grey slip; strong firing.

7. TE-12-in-1. Amphora wall. Fine and homogeneous fabric; colour: light brown-yellowish; soft firing; Decoration made up of undulating lines.

SU12 (fine layer up to grey beaten soil) *(Pl. 12 no. 2)*

2. TE-12-I-8 Bronze hooks.

SU14 (Oldest layer, under the grey beaten soil) *(Pl. 16 no. 8)*

8. TE-12-II-6 Plate. Very fine fabric; colour: light brown-pinkish; medium firing. The fragment is made up of two pieces; the edge shows a decoration in relief.

1.6.3 Area 3: survey in the area of access to the *cella trichora* and to the three tombs

SURVEY UNDER THE AMBO

SU19 (TP-13) *(Pl. 17)*

The base of the pulpit and the "mosaic of the wild beast" underneath hid the entrance to the southernmost tomb of the three in front of the presbytery. Part of the original filling remained *in situ*. Of the pottery, the latest object seems to be the pan TP-13-22 (Pl. 17, no. 11) which is not usually found before the middle of the 6th cent.[225] and which had a final use as a container of chalk, of which ample traces remain. The only coin found belongs to the second half of the 5th cent. A.D.[226].

1. TP-13-19 Amphora. Slightly granular fabric; colour: pinkish, greyish nucleus; strong firing.

2. TP-13-1 Amphora. Fine fabric; colour: reddish; beige slip; strong firing.

3. TP-13-6 Amphora. Fairly granular fabric; colour: reddish-light brown; medium firing. It is a fragment of the rim of the famous amphorae for transport, with a double handle at the rim, already found on Mount Nebo in contexts prior to the Byzantine basilica[227].

4. TP-13-5 Wall of amphora. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; medium firing; decorated with deep comb lines, alternately horizontal and undulating.

5. TP-13-20 Jug handle. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; dark brown slip; medium firing.

6. TP-13-3 Small amphora. Slightly granular fabric; colour: light brown; greyish slip; medium firing.

7. TP-13-17 Jug. Slightly granular fabric; colour: brown-greyish; brown slip; medium firing.

8. TP-13-11 Pot. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; external brown slip, medium firing.

9. TP-13-9 Pot. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; brown slip; medium firing.

10. TP-13-15 Lid. Slightly granular fabric; Diam. 24 cm; colour: pinkish; greyish slip; strong firing.

11. TP-13-22 Pan. Granular fabric with quartzite; colour: brown; strong firing.

12. TP-13-18 Cup. Slightly granular fabric; colour: pinkish; strong firing.

13. TP-13-16 Cup. Fine fabric; colour: grey; light brown slip; strong firing. Internally and externally under the rim there are signs of blackening due to fire (torch?).

14. TP-13-14 Cup. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; medium firing.

15. TP-13-7 Plate. Very fine fabric; brown, grey nucleus; dark brown slip; strong firing.

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225 Alliata 1988, 328.

226 See coin no. 10 in the numismatic note.

227 Bagatti 1985, 270 fig. 15, 1–2; photos 7 and 24.

1.6.4 Area 4: survey in the central nave and in the northern intercolumns

Excavation of the nave

SU23 *(Pl. 18)*

In the western part of the central nave, the preparation layer of a prevalently white but fairly fine mosaic is preserved. Remains of the mosaic are visible near the façade wall and towards the midpoint of the church, on the northern side. This layer contained a good quantity of the mosaic tesserae, and some coins, the latest of which can be dated to between A.D. 408 and 423 (?)[228].

1. TN-13-6 Amphora. Slightly granular fabric; colour: pinkish; medium firing. The various fragments, which cannot be materially joined to one another but probably belong to the same vase, were collected in different parts of the layer. The vase, originally for the import of food, given the non-local fabric, had its final use as a container of lime for works, as shown by the considerable amount of limescale which has remained on the inner walls of the lower parts.
2. TN-13-13 Jug, probably with a spout. Very fine fabric; colour: light brown; dark brown slip; strong firing.
3. TN-13-7 Bent pan handle. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; red slip; strong firing.
4. TN-13-17 Pot. Very fine fabric; colour: brown; medium firing.
5. TN-13-8 Pot. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; dark brown slip; strong firing.
6. TN-13-9 Pot. Very fine fabric; colour: brown; strong firing.
7. TN-13-3 Pot. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; dark brown slip; strong firing.
8. TN-13-11 Cup. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish, blackish nucleus; dark grey slip; strong firing.
9. TN-13-23/4 Cup. Medium fabric; colour: grey, pinkish nucleus; grey slip; strong firing.
10. TN-13-2 Cup. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; strong firing.
11. TN-13-18 Plate. Very fine fabric; colour: grey; brown-greyish slip; medium firing.
12. TN-13-1 Plate. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; medium firing.

Tomb excavation

SU25 *(Pl. 19)*

Fragments of pottery collected in a layer of black soil at the south-west corner of the tomb, outside, and perhaps contemporary with its construction. Numbers 7–9 originate from the 1st cent., like the fragment of alabaster marble frame (Pl. 21, no.3). This period is well testified in the nearby site of Khirbet el-Mukhayyat[229]. The other specimens of pottery are later, i.e. dating to the 5th cent., and date the layer.

1. TC-13-4 Amphora. Fine granular fabric, including quartziferous material; colour: grey, blackish; grey slip; very strong firing.
2. TC-13-9 Pot. Slightly granular fabric; colour: pink; outer grey slip; strong firing.
3. TC-13-16 Handle. Slightly granular fabric; colour: pink; red slip; medium firing.
4. TC-13-11 Amphora. Fine fabric; colour: yellowish; weak firing.
5. TC-13-7 Cup. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; medium firing.
6. TC-13-6 Cup. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; outer grey slip; medium firing.
7. TC-13-12 Bowl. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; strong firing[230].
8. TC-13-3 Pot handle. Very fine fabric; colour: dark brown; medium firing[231].

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228 See coin no. 9 in the numismatic note.
229 Saller 1967, 8–26.
230 Lapp 1961, Type 54, C, G; Loffreda 1996, Group 54.
231 Saller 1967, 11 for the particularity of the handle with a central groove and raised edges.

9. TC-13-5 Pot handle. Very fine fabric; colour: grey; brown slip; strong firing. The ribbon handle and the fairly fine pottery fabric recall the types of the Herodian era of the 1st cent. A.D.[232].

Excavation of the *intercolumnia*

Excavation limited to the northern side between the intercolumns from the third to the eighth. Under the mosaic of the intercolumns, removed in 1976, there is a filling which goes down as far as the rock and appears to have been laid there after the series of independent foundations for the bases of the columns were placed. The chronological horizon is in the second half of the 6th cent. A.D.

SU26 *(Pl. 20, nos. 1–6)*

1. TIIIi-13-5 Pot. Slightly granular fabric; colour: greyish; brown slip; medium firing.
2. TIIIi-13-6 Handle. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; strong firing.
3. TIIIi-13-3 Deep pan. Very fine fabric; colour: light brown; dark brown slip; strong firing. Numerous traces of burning are present on the surface.
4. TIIIi-13-1 Plate. Slightly granular fabric; colour: pinkish; greyish slip; medium firing.
5. TIIIi-13-2 Small cup. Very fine fabric; colour: grey-blackish; dark brown slip; strong firing.
6. TIIIi-13-7 Small cup. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; strong firing.

SU27 *(Pl. 20, nos. 7–8)*

7. TIVi-13-4 Pan. Fine granular fabric; colour: reddish; strong firing.
8. TIVi-13-5 Oil lamp. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; strong firing.

SU28 *(Pl. 20, nos. 9–10)*

9. TVi-13-1 Amphora. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish, external beige slip; strong firing.
10. TVi-13-3 Torch foot. Very fine fabric; colour: reddish, external light brown slip; strong firing.

SU29 *(Pl. 20, nos. 11–21)*

11. TVIi-13-11 Dolium. Fairly granular fabric; colour: pinkish-reddish; medium firing.
12. TVIi-13-9 Amphora. Fine granular fabric; colour: brown; strong firing.
13. TVIi-13-5 Amphora. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish, yellowish nucleus; internal grey slip; strong firing.
14. TVIi-13-7 Pot. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; light brown slip; medium firing.
15. TVIi-13-4 Pot. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; external black slip; strong firing.
16. TVIi-13-1 Pot. Fine granular fabric; colour: pink; external brown slip, strong firing.
17. TVIi-13-14 Jug with spout (fragment). Fine fabric; colour: pink, external and on the rim grey slip; medium firing.
18. TVIi-13-10 Cup. Fine fabric; colour: pink, grey in cross-section; external beige slip; strong firing.
19. TVIi-13-12 Basin. Granular fabric; colour: pinkish, grey in cross-section; beige slip; strong firing. Handmade.
20. TVIi-13-6 Basin. Fine fabric; colour: grey; dark grey slip; string firing.
21. TVIi-13-18 *Polycandelon* (fragment only of the tubular shaft). Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; grey slip; medium firing. Similar to the one found under the mosaics at the eastern end of the northern nave, today in the Museum of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem[233].

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232 Lapp 1961, Type 71, N2; Loffreda 1996, groups 37–42.
233 Bagatti 1985, 254–255, fig. 2, 1; photo 2.

1.6.5 Catalogue of architectonic fragments

Alabaster marbles of various origin *(Pl. 21)*

1. Frame. Regular moulding of stripe and quarter circles arranged in a direction opposite to one another. It appears polished on all sides except the lower one, showing that it must have been placed in an eminent position, for example, crowning the tympanum. The piece was already shown in a photograph, although with some uncertainties[234].

2. Frame similar to the previous one, but with the lower part smooth to be positioned in view.

3. Frame Moulding made up of a quarter of a circle and gutter. A piece similar to this one was found "under the steps leading to the presbytery" by S. Saller[235]. His piece, today lost, however has a double moulding, in front and behind, perhaps due to reworking.

Catalogue of Alabaster Marbles of the Tomb *(Pl. 22)*

The pieces in marble used again in the highest row of the tomb are presented here. The catalogue collects together the analytical data only of the sides visible of each element, as they are still *in situ*. For a detailed description of the parts and of the mouldings not visible, please refer to piece number thirteen. The measurements refer to the maximum values of the polished side.

1. Base of a rectangular shape made up of a rod with a fine vertical fracture in one point; the supposed continuation of the decoration is buried. The moulded side is smooth and polished, the other shows typical rough working to be laid against a wall. 16 × 60 cm.

2. Slab with *lesena*. Rectangular shape with an irregular profile, smoothing on the main face, the other is rough. Originally placed on the facade. 26 × 54 cm.

3. Base of frame with corner *lesena*. Same moulding and work as piece no. 1. The rod rotates in correspondence with the *lesena*. 13 × 44.5 cm.

4. Rectangular-shaped slab with an irregular profile with a clean oblique cut on one of the short sides, smoothed on one side, rough on the other. Originally placed on the façade. 25 × 33 cm.

5. Rectangular slab with an irregular profile similar to the previous one. Same working. Originally placed on the façade with the pervious piece. 21 × 13.5 cm.

6. Rectangular slab with an irregular profile. Same working. Originally placed on the façade with pieces nos. 4 and 5. 27.5 × 22 cm.

7. Rectangular slab with an irregular profile. Same working. Originally placed on the façade with pieces nos. 4, 5 and 6. 25 × 33.5 cm.

8. Rectangular slab with an irregular profile. Same working. Originally placed on the façade with pieces nos. 4, 5, 6 and 7. 26 × 34 cm.

9. Part of *lesena* of rectangular shape with an irregular profile similar to piece no. 2. One side is smooth, the other rough. 28.5 × 39.5 cm

10. Rectangular base. Smoothed on the moulded side, rough on the other. The decoration is the same as pieces nos. 1 and 3, the rod in fractured in the final part. 16.5 × 36 cm.

11. Rectangular base. Smoothed on the moulded side, rough on the other. Same moulding as based 1, 3 and 10. 42.5 × 16.5 cm.

12. Rectangular base with corner *lesena*; the rod is fractured in many points, polished on the moulded side, rough on the other. Same moulding as pieces nos. 1, 3, 10 and 11. 16.5 × 62 cm.

13. Base of *lesena* the moulding of which is the classic one of a base of building that the proportions show as having been of modest dimensions. The work includes the right corner of the façade or, perhaps, the jamb of a door. The piece was recovered in September 2014 from the west side of the tomb in the centre of the basilica, where it was situated in an upside-down position with the moulded side fixed in the wall. Its constructive characteristics could be observed with precision only by removing it.

234 Acconci 1998, no. 154b. 154c.
235 Saller 1941, 296 no. 161; fig. 14, 4; pl. 127, 2.

2. NEW DATA ON THE MONASTERY OF MOUNT NEBO IN THE EARLY ISLAMIC PERIOD

The stratigraphic survey conducted on the presbytery of the basilica and in room no. 103 of the monastery has returned a large group of pottery sherds, which stand out for their chronological homogeneity linked to the Umayyad period and to the early Abbasid one. Considering this important chronological context, connected to the last phases of the monastic complex and its abandonment, a specific in-depth study on the types of pottery that have come to light becomes necessary (Fig. 85).

Without going over the history of the excavations, it has to be remembered that the finds from the first excavation campaigns directed by S. Saller were presented only through a selection of photographs and brief references in the text, but without an accurate study of the stratigraphic sequence of reference[236]. This circumstance has unfortunately contributed to the loss of a great deal of information about the later contexts. Indeed, the abandonment phase was considered on the basis of an imprecise chronology diffused at that time and it was dated to the end of the Byzantine period (early 7th cent. A.D.). The pottery finds identified by S. Saller were the object of a typological study by H. Schneider, which was published in the third volume of the series dedicated to the excavation of Mount Nebo[237]. The archaeologist's attention, addressing a morphological examination of the shapes, concentrated on the division of the vessels into functional categories, indicating the rooms of origin of the material, but without providing any precise chronological reference[238].

The continuation of the excavations in the archaeological site, directed by V. Corbo, M. Piccirillo and C. Pappalardo, was mainly aimed at the lower levels of the church and some external areas, which mostly presented frequentation in the Byzantine period[239]. Pottery referable to the Umayyad period came to light during the archaeological survey of a portion of room no. 56 in July 1987 by a mission from the University of Florence[240]. These finds are relative to the last phases of frequentation when, probably due to the earthquake in A.D. 749, the occupation of the site had to be limited to only the areas closest to the basilica.

The recent surveys addressed to the monastic church and room no. 103, do not yet allow an exhaustive interpretation of the nature of the archaeological contexts and of the chronology of the monastic rooms, however they are witnesses of an activity of reconstruction during the period of transition from the Umayyad period to the Abbasid one. This is clear from the sample of pottery typologies identified in these surveys which has allowed tracing back shapes known in circulation in the central part of the province of *Arabia* between the 8th and the beginning of the 9th cent. A.D. The samples of the shapes, decoration and pottery fabrics are fully part of the typology known as *creamy ware* and *Balqa ware*[241].

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236 Saller 1941. On the subject, see Vanni Desideri 2012, 302–304.

237 Schneider 1950.

238 Vanni Desideri 2012, 302.

239 Especially the south-eastern wing of the monastery.

240 In particular referred to the most recent layers of room no. 56, when, as this wing of the monastery was no longer in use, considerable levels of waste from the summit of the mountain accumulated inside the room. See phase VI in Vanni Desideri 2012, 309–331.

241 The most important diagnostic examples of the diocese of Madaba come from the sites of Umm er-Rasas and Nitl. See in this regard Alliata 1991, Pappalardo 2002, Hamarneh 2006.

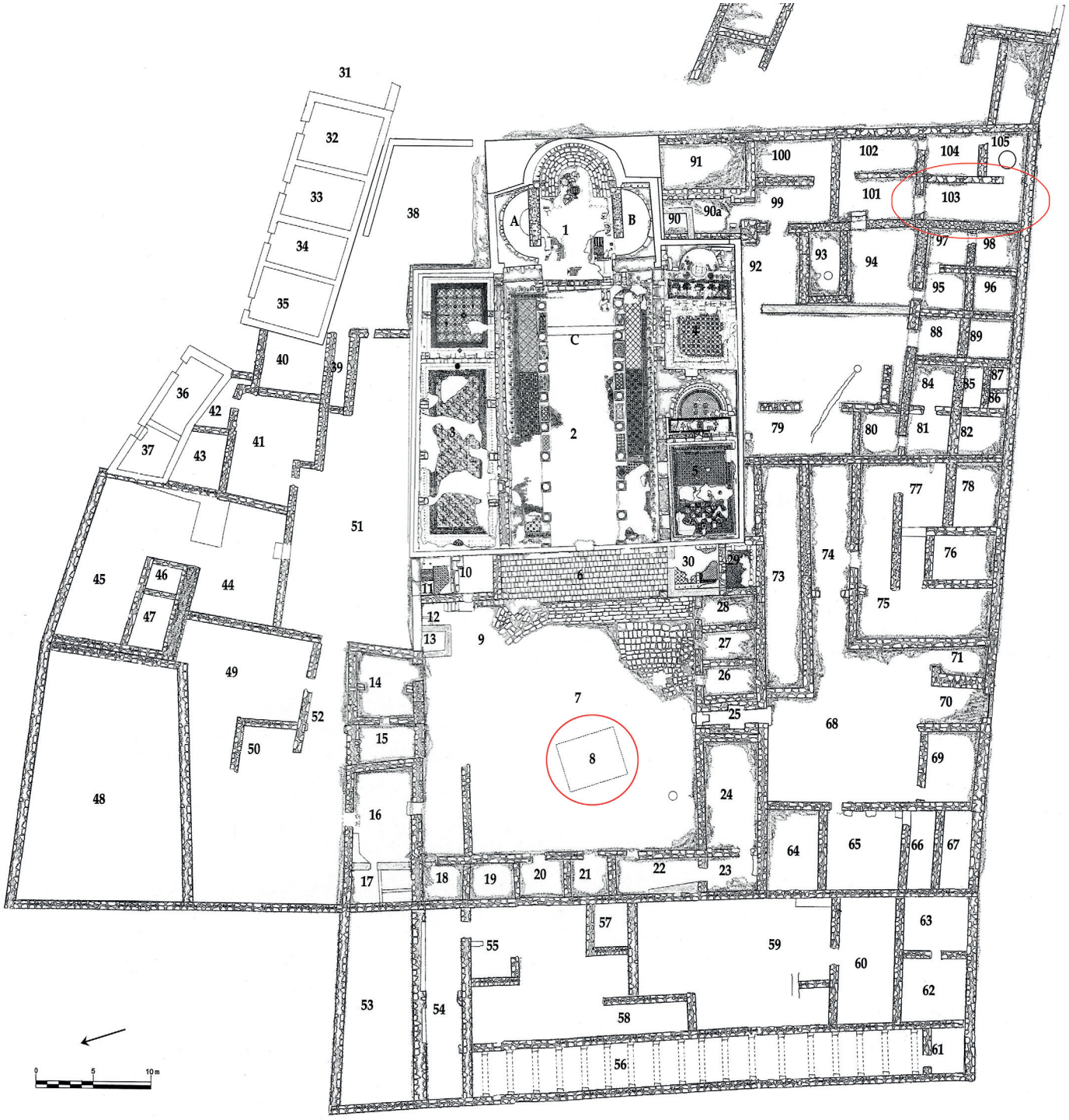

Fig. 85 Memorial of Moses. Plan of the monastery showing the *loci* excavated (drawing by G. Micalizzi and C. Puglisi).

Contemporary with these pottery fragments is the fairly homogeneous set found in the excavation of cistern no. 8 standing in the centre of the atrium in front of the basilica's façade. The pottery, made up of large-sized pieces, which in many cases could be reconstructed, has been studied here because it is still unpublished and it presents the characteristics of fabric and shape typical of the period under examination.

These data allow the monastery standing on the summit of Siyagha to be put into relation with other monastic complexes in the surrounding valleys, in particular with the finds from the monastery of Theotokos in the Wadi 'Ain el-Kanisah.

The study of the pottery was preceded by the digitalization of all the previous ceramological documentation in a new online data base, conceived by the restorer M. Chorosiński[242]. The relational database of Mount Nebo is of the MySQL type and allows the information about the finds from the archaeological excavations in the monastic complex to be digitally stored. The objective has been to create an interface that would allow the connection of tables containing the various data, thereby making it possible for a user to add new items to the fields or to modify the existing ones. The command of the search function allows detailed data from the different tables to be recovered and listed all together. The database also includes a couple of scripts on the homepage to which a general map of the site is connected. By clicking on one specific sector of the Mount Nebo complex, it is possible to list all the items relative to that specific place. The examination of the pottery fragments has followed the same methodological premises shown on page 86.

Fig. 86 Memorial of Moses. Flagstone pavement in room no. 90.

Fig. 87 Memorial of Moses. Basin in room no. 89.

The survey in the southern wing of the monastery has also affected the cleaning of room no. 90 and of room no. 89 to photographically document the channel and basin mentioned by S. Saller[243] (Figs. 86–87).

242 The Website can be consulted at: <http://nebo.restoration.com.pl>

243 Saller 1941, 176–178; 185.

2.1 EXCAVATION OF ROOM NO. 103

The archaeological surveys carried out in the southern sector of the monastery were motivated by practical necessities relative to conduits for the new electrical system of the basilica. The excavations thus allowed deeper reflections on the final phases of occupation of the monastic complex (Figs. 88–89).

Room no. 103, inspected at a superficial level in the years 1933–1935, was identified by S. Saller as a lobby between room no. 105, containing an oven, and room no. 101[244]. The presence of two other ovens in room no. 93 had suggested that the archaeologist recognize in this section the productive area connected with the dietary needs of the monastery[245]. This hypothesis was confirmed by the new finds during the latest investigations.

After having cleaned the room of the modern accumulation, the filling was identified, made up of irregular stones, probably attributable to work done by V. Corbo in 1964, during which some rooms of the monastery were filled in[246]. In the layer SU.M1031 some out of context pottery fragments were identified (Pl. 23). Continuing the excavation, SU.M1032 was found at −1 m from the initial level, made up of an even yellowish layer with numerous traces of ashes which extended uniformly over the whole surface of the room (Pl. 24). The removal of this SU allowed the identification of a paving SU.M1033 in the northern portion of the room, the same as already identified in S. Saller's excavation[247] (Fig. 91–92). In the southern portion of the room, the foundations of a wall with an east-west orientation (SU.M1034) were identified, parallel to the external perimeter wall of the room, and an embankment of irregular stones SU.M1035 (Figs. 90, 93).

When the paving was eliminated, an oven (SU.M1036), like those excavated in rooms in nos. 105 and 93[248], was found (Figs. 94–95). The middle-lower portion of the structure is kept with a depth of 85 cm and a diameter of 150 cm. The clay walls are about 4–5 cm thick. The excavation of the oven has returned two layers full of archaeological material from the Umayyad era (SU.M1037 and SU.M139) (Figs. 96–97; Pls. 25–28) spaced out by a compact layer of red earth and ashes SU.M1037.

List of Stratigraphic Units Room no. 103	
SU.M1030	Modern accumulation
SU.M1031	Layer of irregular stones attributable to 1964 filling
SU.M1032	Compact yellowish layer at level −1.00 which evenly covered the whole room
SU.M1033	Stone paving in the northern portion of the room
SU.M1034	Foundations of a wall with east-west orientation
SU.M1035	Irregular embankment of stones in the southern portion of the room
SU.M1036	Oven
SU.M1037	Filling of the oven, upper layer under the paving
SU.M1038	Fine layer of compact reddish earth and accumulation of ash
SU.M1039	Filling of the oven, lower layer

244 Saller 1941, 181–182.
245 Saller 1941, 181–182.
246 Corbo 1970.
247 Saller 1941, 181.
248 The cylindrical oven of room no. 93 has walls 4 cm thick, is 111 cm deep and has a diameter of 130 cm. The oven in room 105 is 3–4 cm thick, 125 cm deep with a diameter comprised between 140–154 cm. In detail, see Saller 1941, 171–172, figs. 21. 182.

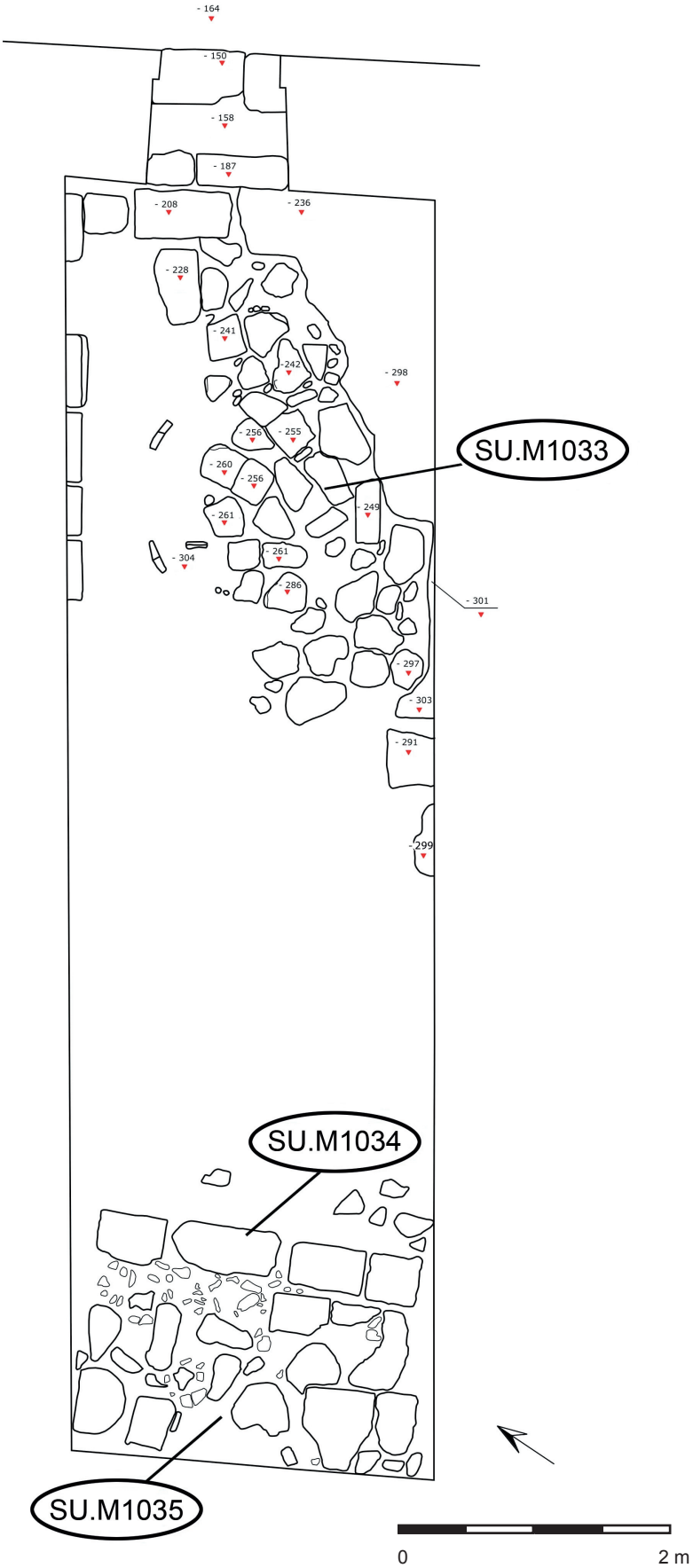

Fig. 88 Memorial of Moses. Plan of room no. 103.

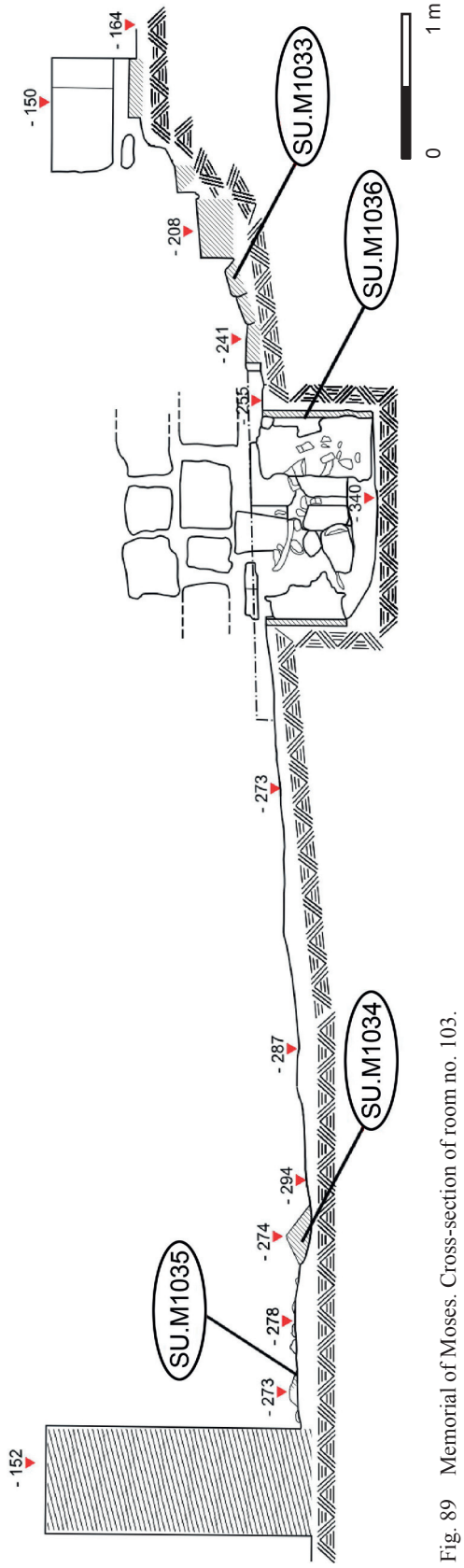

Fig. 89 Memorial of Moses. Cross-section of room no. 103.

Fig. 90 Memorial of Moses. Room no. 103, northern side.

Fig. 91 Memorial of Moses. Room no. 103, southern side.

Fig. 92 Memorial of Moses. Room no. 103, detail of flagstones paving (SU.M1033).

Fig. 93
Memorial of Moses. Room no. 103, detail of the southern wall.

Fig. 94
Memorial of Moses. Room no. 103, detail of the oven.

Fig. 95
Memorial of Moses. Room no. 103, the oven after excavation.

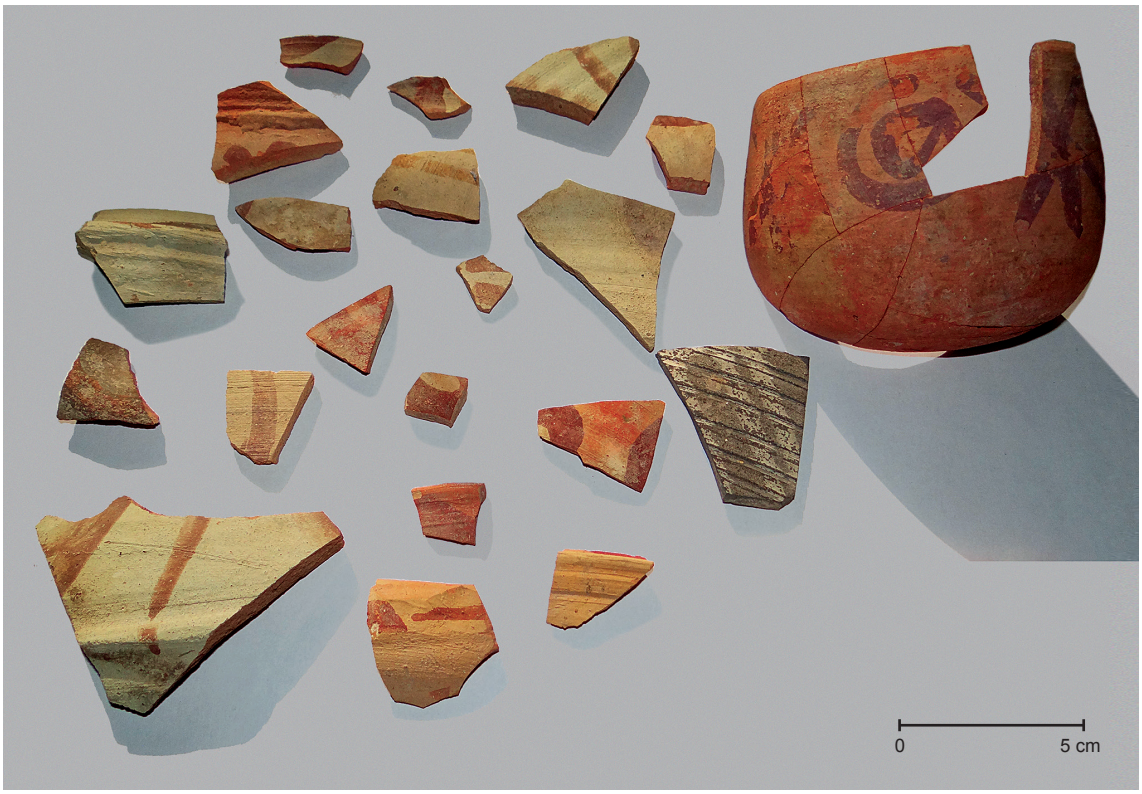

Fig. 96 Memorial of Moses. Room no. 103, Umayyad pottery sherds.

Fig. 97 Memorial of Moses. Room no. 103, Umayyad cup found in SU.M1037.

2.1.1 Catalogue of finds

SU.M1031 (from the surface; filling mainly made up of stones, building waste after Corbo 1964) *(Pl. 23)*

1. MN-103-A-16 Wall of vase. Granular fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing. Decoration with deep combed carvings.
2. MN-103-A-12 Wall of vase. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; traces of fine beige slip; strong firing. Decoration probably made of circles or spirals in a dark red colour.
3. MN-103-A-14 Pitcher. Fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: beige; strong firing. There is a decoration made up of a continuous series of short signs on the edge of the vessel and a sinuous band which is developed on the neck of the vessel; the decorations are painted in dark red.
4. MN-103-A-3 Pitcher. Granular fabric; Diam. 12 cm; colour: dark brown; medium firing.
5. MN-103-A-7 Jar. Granular fabric; Diam. 36 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing.
6. MN-103-A-11 Plate. Slightly granular fabric; Diam. 26 cm; colour: pinkish; strong firing.
7. MN-103-A-9 Curved tile. Granular fabric; colour: pinkish; dark brown slip; strong firing.
8. MN-103-A-10 Tile. Slightly granular fabric; colour: beige; medium firing.

SU.M1032 (at ca. −1.00 m from the surface; yellow beaten soil with ash) *(Pl. 24)*

1. MN-103-B-1 Basin. Granular fabric; Diam. 28 cm; colour: pink; beige slip; strong firing. There is a decoration made up deeply engraved comb-like lines.
2. MN-103-B-2 Basin. Granular fabric; Diam. 24 cm; colour: beige; greyish slip; medium firing.
3. MN-103-B-9 Jug. Granular fabric; Diam. 12 cm; colour: reddish; beige slip; medium firing.
4. MN-103-B-10 Plate (?). Granular fabric; Diam. 26 cm; colour: light brown, dark brown slip; strong firing.
5. MN-103-B-5 Bottom of pot. Granular fabric; colour: pinkish; strong firing. Externally darkened by fire.
6. MN-103-B-14 Vessel wall decorated with red paint. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing.
7. MN-103-B-7 Tile. Granular fabric; colour: beige; medium firing.
8. MN-103-B-8 Tile. Granular fabric; colour: beige; medium firing.

SU.M1037 (emptying of oven, under the paving) *(Pls. 25–27)*

1. MN-103-I-3 Jug. Granular fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing. Dark red paint.
2. MN-103-I-18 Jug. Fine fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: pinkish; light slip, red paint; strong firing.
3. MN-103-I-61 Handle in two pieces. Fine fabric, small white inclusions are present; colour: pinkish, brown nucleus; beige slip; very strong firing.
4. MN-103-I-30 Handle and wall. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip, dark red paint; very strong firing.
5. MN-103-I-40 Vessel wall decorated with red paint. Slightly granular fabric; colour: brown; black slip; strong firing.
6. MN-103-I-43 Vessel wall decorated with dark red paint. Slightly granular fabric; colour: brown; beige slip; strong firing.
7. MN-103-I-42 Vessel wall decorated with red paint. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing. The decorations are made up of plant volutes and spirals.
8. MN-103-I-63 Jug. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip; very strong firing.
9. MN-103-I-62 Cup. Very fine fabric; Diam. 9.5 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing. Decoration that develops on the shoulder of the vase made up of geometric marks (spirals alternating with six-pointed stars) in dark red paint applied after firing.
10. MN-103-I-14 Jug. Granular fabric; Diam. 14 cm; colour: light brown; beige slip; strong firing.
11. MN-103-I-7 Jug. Slightly granular fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: light brown; dark slip; strong firing.
12. MN-103-I-4 Jug. Very granular-quartziferous fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: light brown; dark slip; strong firing.
13. MN-103-I-16 Jug. Medium granular fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: pinkish; dark slip and signs of burning; strong firing.

14. MN-103-I-17 Jug. Very fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: beige-greenish; weak firing.

15. MN-103-I-11 Jug. Granular-quartziferous fabric; Diam. 16 cm; colour: pinkish; dark slip; strong firing.

16. MN-103-I-15 Jug. Granular-quartziferous fabric; Diam. 12 cm; colour: brown; grey slip; medium firing.

17. MN-103-I-26 Pot. Granular-quartziferous fabric; Diam. 12 cm; colour: brown, blackish nucleus; dark brown slip; strong firing.

18. MN-103-I-27 Pot. Granular fabric; Diam. 14 cm; colour: pinkish; blackish slip; strong firing.

19. MN-103-I-29 Pot. Medium granular fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: reddish; dark brown slip; strong firing.

20. MN-103-I-13 Lid. Fine fabric; Diam. 24 cm; colour: pinkish; greyish slip; medium firing, Traces of darkening by fire are present.

21. MN-103-I-64 Lid. Slightly granular fabric; Diam. 20 cm; colour: pinkish; dark grey slip; strong firing.

22. MN-103-I-19 Lid. Granular fabric; Diam. 14 cm; colour: pinkish; greyish slip; string firing.

23. MN-103-I-8 Lid. Slightly granular fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: pinkish; dark slip; medium firing.

24. MN-103-I-22 Lid. Fine fabric; Diam. 16 cm; colour: pinkish; greyish slip; strong firing.

25. MN-103-I-6 Plate. Slightly granular fabric; Diam. 22 cm; colour: beige; strong firing.

26. MN-103-I-9 Lid. Slightly granular fabric; Diam. 18 cm; colour: pinkish; dark brown slip; very strong firing.

27. MN-103-I-24 Basin. Fine fabric, small inclusions; Diam. 28 cm; colour: beige; strong firing. Incised comb-like decoration.

28. MN-103-I-5 Plate. Fine fabric; Diam. 22 cm; colour: light brown; dark slip; strong firing.

29. MN-103-I-2 Basin. Fine fabric; Diam. 26 cm; colour: beige; medium firing.

30. MN-103-I-10 Plate. Fine fabric; Diam. 28 cm; colour: brown; strong firing.

31. MN-103-I-25 Plate. Fine fabric; Diam. 24 cm; colour: beige; strong firing. The wall is twisted, perhaps a reject of production.

32. MN-103-I-23 Base of oil lamp. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; string firing.

33. MN-103-I-20 Tile. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish, orange nucleus; beige slip; strong firing.

SU.M1039 (emptying of oven, under compact layer of red soil and ash) *(Pl. 28)*

1. MN-103-II-4 Jug. Fine fabric; Diam. 12 cm; colour: greyish; beige slip; strong firing.

2. MN-103-II-8 Jug. Granular fabric; Diam. 12 cm; colour: brown, light brown nucleus; beige slip; strong firing.

3. MN-103-II-6 Jug. Fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: brown; greyish slip; strong firing.

4. MN-103-II-12 Jug. Fine fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: light brown; beige slip; very strong firing.

5. MN-103-II-10 Jug. Fine fabric; Diam. 6 cm; colour: brown; beige slip; strong firing.

6. MN-103-II-11 Bowl. Very fine fabric; Diam. 14 cm; colour: brown; greyish slip; strong firing.

7. MN-103-II-7 Cup. Slightly granular fabric; Diam. 12 cm; colour: pinkish; greyish slip; strong firing.

8. MN-103-II-2 Small amphora. Very fine fabric; Diam. 15 cm; colour: pinkish, slightly lighter nucleus; beige slip; strong firing. The shoulder is decorated with a continuous spiral painted red.

9. MN-103-II-17 Small cup. Fine fabric; Diam. 12 cm; colour: reddish; strong firing.

10. MN-103-II-21 Lid. Granular fabric; Diam. 21 cm; colour: pinkish; grey slip; medium firing.

11. MN-103-II-5 Lid. Granular fabric; Diam. 22 cm; colour: light brown; dark brown slip, signs of blackening; strong firing.

12. MN-103-II-1 Tile. Granular fabric; colour: brown; beige slip; medium firing.

13. MN-103-II-23 Tile. Granular fabric; colour: reddish; medium firing.

2.1.2 Conclusions

The closed vessels pertaining to the contexts of room no. 103 are characterized by modest dimensions, vertical and slightly thickened lips and by thin walls which allow the supposition of domestic use. The pottery finds can be divided into two groups depending on the fabric. The first contains vessels with a medium purified fabric with whitish inclusions of small dimensions and a colour from reddish-brown to grey (Pl. 26, nos. 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16). The firing is strong. The second group consists of vessels with a purified fabric of a pinkish colour with outer beige slip and decoration in red paint. The walls are carefully smoothed and the firing is strong (Pl. 23, no. 3; Pl. 25, nos. 1, 2).

The cooking shapes are well attested in the layer, with a good number of pots with a short cylindrical neck with low ribbing and handles which are grafted on to the shoulder with an elliptical cross-section and often a two-ribbed ribbon (Pl. 26, nos. 17, 18, 19). Exceptionally well-preserved are the lids made with a reddish brown and medium purified fabric containing white inclusions of small dimensions (Pl. 26, nos. 20, 21, 22, 23, 24; Pl. 28, nos. 10, 11). The shapes are mainly truncated-conical characterized by the use of ribbing in relief and vent holes. No specimen has preserved the grips at the top.

The shapes for tableware include some basins of a truncated-conical shape with a raised rim or of the enlarged type, characterized by a fabric which has been little purified, with a colour from pinkish to beige, beige slip and in some cases external incised comb-like decoration (Pl. 24, nos. 1, 2; Pl. 27, nos. 27, 29). The plates, characterized by an everted rim, still follow the late Byzantine typology (Pl. 23, no. 6; Pl. 26, no. 25; Pl. 27, nos. 27, 28, 30, 31). Amongst the open shapes, for the purposes of dating, a cup without a foot of a truncated-conical shape, with carefully smoothed wall, a very fine pinkish fabric, a light outer layer with a light-coloured slip and geometric decoration with red abstract signs is of great importance (Fig. 97; Pl. 25, no. 9)[249].

The same type of decoration and fabric is attested for small amphorae and jugs of which some fragments were recovered during the excavation (Pl. 24, no. 6; Pl. 25, nos. 1, 2; Pl. 28, no. 8). These vessels belong to the so-called *red-painted ware*, characterized by light, pure and well-fired fabrics, and naturally red paint[250]. The main centre of production is still unknown, but considering the area of finds, A. G. Walmsley suggests production linked to the area of the Balqa', in particular the region north of Amman[251]. The quality and diffusion of this type of pottery reached a peak in the second half of the 8th cent. A.D., as shown by the interesting parallels that came to light in the sites of Umm er-Rasas[252], Tell Jawa south of Amman[253], Amman[254] and Khirbet es-Samra[255]. Worthy of note are some morphological modifications that concern the bottom of the vessels, which tend to prefer flat bases rather than bases with an umbilicus of the Byzantine period[256].

[249] There are numerous comparisons with the site of Umm er-Rasas, see Alliata 1991, 395–396.
[250] On this type of pottery, the subject of numerous studies, see at least Amr 1986; Gawlikoski 1995; Walmsley 2007, 341–344.
[251] Walmsley 2007, 342.
[252] Alliata 1991; Alliata 1993; Sanmorì – Pappalardo 1997; Pappalardo 2002.
[253] Daviau – Beckmann 1994, 259–274.
[254] Northedge 1992, fig. 131.
[255] Humbert – Desreumaux 1998.
[256] Bianchi 2007, 172.

2.2. THE EXCAVATION OF CISTERN NO. 8 IN THE ATRIUM IN FRONT OF THE BASILICA

The cistern at the centre of the atrium, in front of the façade of the basilica, was found by S. Saller during the archaeological campaigns of 1933–1935 and identified with the number 8 on the general plan of the monastic complex[257] (Fig. 85, 98). The excavation was carried out in September 1995 and in May 1996 under the direction of E. Alliata[258]. Considering the particularity of the material found, chronologically and typically related to that from room no. 103 of the monastery and the upper rows of the *synthronon*, it was decided to publish it here.

List of Stratigraphic Units Cistern 8	
SU100	Walls of cistern containing small pottery fragments
SU101	Fine layer of plaster facing the walls of the cistern
SU200	Layer of cistern filling at level −1.60 m
SU201	Layer of cistern filling at level −2.50 m containing the reliquary S_21172[259]
SU202	Layer of cistern filling at level −3.70 m containing the capital S_21173[260]
SU203	Layer of cistern filling at level −3.90 m containing marbles S_21174–S_21193[261]
SU300	Layer of cistern filling at level − 4.00 m with pottery sherds
SU301	Layer of cistern filling at level −5.00 m with pottery sherds
SU302	Layer of cistern filling at level −5.50 m with pottery sherds
SU303	Layer of cistern filling at level −6.00 m with pottery sherds
SU400	Layer of cistern filling at level −6.60 m with pottery sherds
SU401	Upper layer of accumulation on the bottom of the cistern with pottery sherds
SU402	Lower layer of accumulation on the bottom of the cistern with pottery sherds

The structure, excavated wholly in the rock, is square in shape and measures 5.5 × 6 m with a depth of 6.60 m from the level of the atrium[262] (Figs. 100–101). Internally the cistern is made up of blocks of local stone laid in regular courses faced with plaster and by a second layer of small lateral stones[263] (Fig. 99). At the time of the excavation in 1995, the vaulted roof partially appeared intact along the northern and southern sides while the remaining part had collapsed on to the upper layers of the filling[264]. The interior of the tank, as well as the superficial rubble, showed a rich stratigraphy with archaeological material. The upper layers were rich in architectonic elements, including one intact column, a capital and marble fragments belonging to the liturgical furnishings (Figs. 103–104). These marble elements were published by A. Acconci in the catalogue of stone finds in the volume on Nebo edited by M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata. As they are therefore already published in the literature, it was not deemed useful to present them here again, but the reader is invited to consult them elsewhere[265]. The lower levels, on the other hand, contained pottery fragments which are analysed here and a belt buckle (Fig. 102).

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257 The cistern was seen for the first time by C. R. Conder who mentioned it in his survey. In this regard, see Conder 1889, 155 and also Saller 1941, 77; pl. 49, 1–2; pl. 161; Alliata 1996, 394.

258 Alliata 1996, 394.

259 Acconci 1998, 499 no. 82.

260 Acconci 1998, 475 no. 12.

261 Acconci 1998, 484 no. 37. 487 no. 50. 489 no. 58. 499 no. 81. 507–509 no. 102. 516–518 nos. 131–133. 525 no. 148–149.

262 Saller 1941, 77; Alliata 1996, 394.

263 Alliata 1996, 394.

264 Alliata 1996, 394; Saller 1941, 77.

265 See in this regard the catalogue in Acconci 1998, 471–542.

Fig. 98 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8 at the time of SALLER's excavation.

Fig. 99 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8 after the excavation in 1996 (after Alliata 1996, 394).

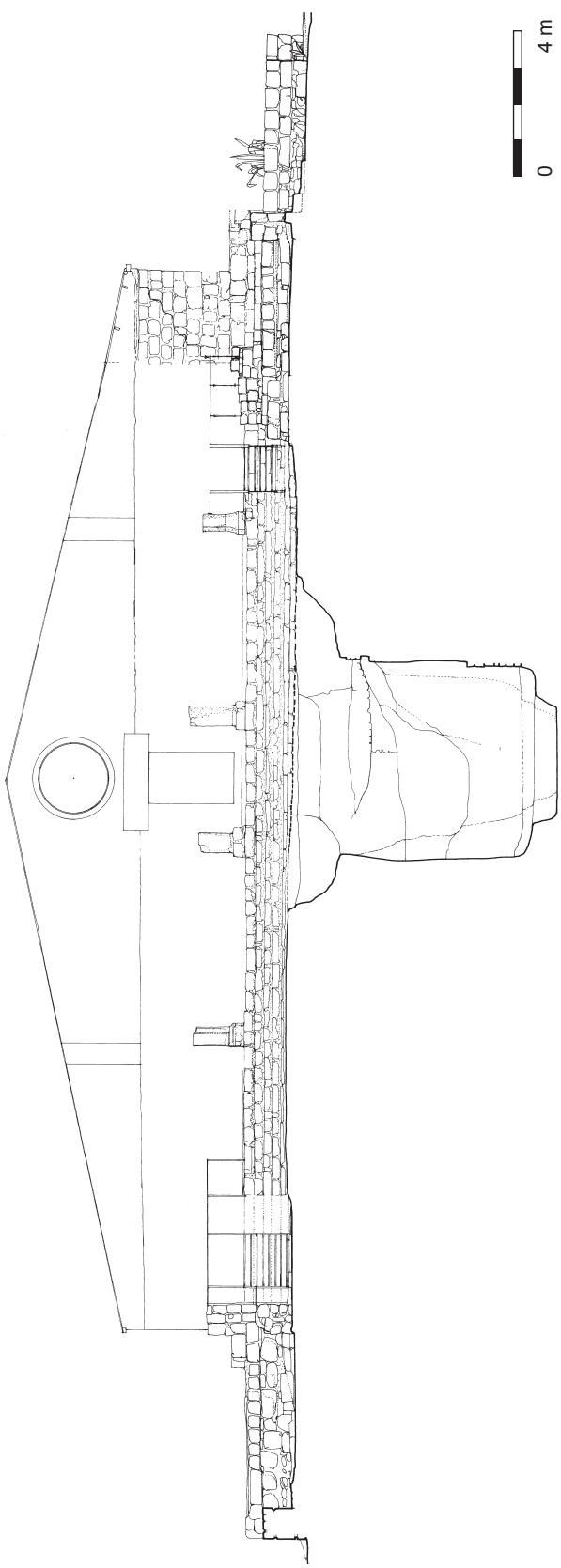

Fig. 100 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8, north-south cross-section after excavation.

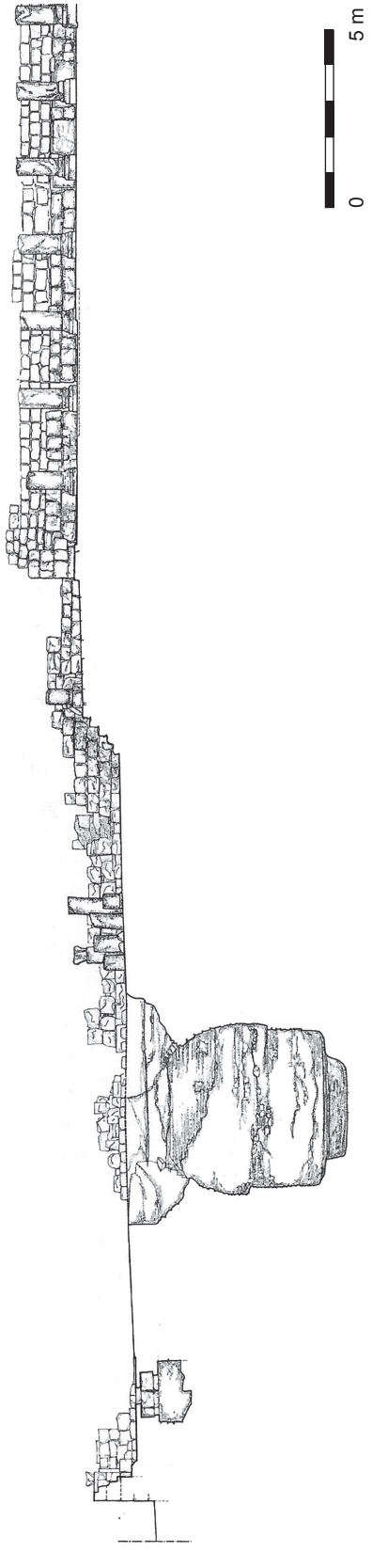

Fig. 101 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8, east-west cross-section after excavation.

Fig. 102 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8, bronze buckle.

Fig. 103 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8, column found in SU203.

Fig. 104 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8, marble fragments belonging to the liturgical furnishings found in SU203.

2.2.1 Catalogue of finds

SU100 (cistern walls) S_21151–S_21169 *(Pls. 29–30)*

1. S_21160 Amphora. Very fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: pinkish, brown in cross-section; beige slip; metal firing.

2. S_21161 Pot. Fine fabric; Diam. 16; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing.

3. S_21156 Cup. Very fine fabric. Diam. 20 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip, red paint with geometric motif; strong firing.

4. S_21152 Basin. Granular fabric; Diam. 28 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing.

5. S_21167 Basin. Fine fabric; Diam. 24 cm; colour: brown, grey in cross-section; weak firing.

6. S_21159 Small amphora (foot). Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; very strong firing.

7. S_21158 Basin. Fine fabric; Diam. 30 cm; colour: brown, pinkish in cross-section; beige slip, incised geometric decoration; strong firing.

8. S_21162 Tile. Granular fabric; colour: pinkish, grey in cross-section; strong firing.

9. S_21166 Tile. Granular fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing.

10. S_21169 Small brick. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing.

SU300 (sherds at level −4.00 m) S_21196–S_21208 *(Pls. 31–32)*

1. S_21200_21240_21292 Flask. Very fine fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: grey; pinkish slip; very strong firing. (Combines fragments S_21240, S_21292).

2. S_21196 Small amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: pinkish, brown in cross-section; beige slip, red paint; very strong firing.

3. S_21205_21229_21253_21254 Small amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: yellowish, white slip, dark red painted decoration; medium firing (combines the fragments S_21229, S_21253, S_21199, S_21254).

4. S_21206 Cup. Very fine fabric; Diam. 10; colour: light brown; metal firing.

5. S_21204 Amphora (base). Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; white slip, red paint; medium firing.

SU301 (sherds at level −5.00 m) S_21209–S_21223 *(Pls. 33–34)*

1. S_21210 Large jar for oil. Medium fabric with small white and black inclusions; Diam. 18; colour: pinkish, beige in cross-section; white slip, decoration incised with comb; strong firing.

2. S_21214 Basin. Medium fabric with small white inclusions; Diam. 28; colour: brown; beige slip, decoration incised with comb; strong firing.

3. S_21215 Basin. Medium fabric with small white inclusions; Diam. 28; colour: pinkish; white slip, decoration incised with comb; strong firing.

4. S_21216 Basin. Fine fabric; Diam. 28; colour: yellowish, plastic cord decoration; medium firing.

5. S_21220 Large jar for oil (base). Medium fabric with white inclusions; colour: pinkish, light brown in cross-section; beige slip; very strong firing.

6. S_21217 Basin. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; white slip, brown in cross-section; strong firing.

7. S_21211 Basin. Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; white slip, decoration incised with comb; strong firing.

8. S_21212 Large jar for oil (handle). Medium fabric with white inclusions; colour: pinkish; white slip; strong firing.

9. S_21223 Large jar for oil (handle). Granular fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip, red paint; strong firing.

10. S_21219 Small brick. Very fine fabric; colour: light brown; beige slip; very strong firing.

SU302 (sherds at level −5.50 m) S_21224–S_21248 *(Pls. 35–36)*

1. S_21225 Jug. Very fine fabric; Diam. 12 cm; colour: light brown, beige slip; very strong firing.

2. S_21230 Small amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: pinkish, beige slip, red paint; very strong firing. (Combines fragment S_21320).

3. S_21231_S_21348 Amphora. Very fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: pinkish, beige slip, red paint; very strong firing. (Combines fragments S_21291, S_21317, S_21348).

4. S_21236 Rim of small amphora. Very fine fabric; Diam. 10; colour: pinkish, light brown in cross-section; beige slip, red paint; strong firing.

5. S_21244 Small jug. Fine fabric; Diam.12 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip, red paint; very strong firing.

6. S_21245 Amphora. Very fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip; very strong firing.

7. S_21235 Small amphora (base). Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip, red paint; strong firing.

8. S_21237 Pot. Medium fabric with white inclusions; Diam. 14 cm; colour: light brown, black in cross-section, external blackish patina of firing, ribbing on neck and shoulder; very strong firing.

9. S_21242 Pan (bottom). Very fine fabric; Diam. 11 cm; colour: grey; beige slip; metal firing. Cf. S_21250

10. S_21239 Handle. Fine fabric; colour: yellowish; strong firing.

11. S_21226 Oil lamps of the type with vine decoration. Fine fabric; colour: beige; weak firing.

SU303 (sherds at level −6.00 m) S_21250–S_21286 *(Pls. 37–38)*

1. S_21259 Bottle. Fine fabric, small white inclusions; Diam. 6.5 cm; colour: light brown; beige slip, red paint; strong firing.

2. S_21280 Amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: light brown, pinkish in cross-section; beige slip; strong firing.

3. S_21266 Amphora. Very fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing.

4. S_21267 Amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing.

5. S_21268 Small amphora. Very fine fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: light brown; beige slip, red paint; strong firing.

6. S_21273 Jug. Fine fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: yellowish; strong firing.

7. S_21265 Amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: pinkish; strong firing. (Combines fragment S_21330).

8. S_21281 Small amphora. Very fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing.

9. S_21258_21360 Cup. Very fine fabric; Diam. 20 cm; colour: pinkish, brown in cross-section; beige slip, decoration with plant scrolls in red paint which enclose alternately a bunch of grapes and a lanceolate leaf; metal firing.

10. S_21264 Cup. Very fine fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip, red paint; very strong firing.

11. S_21277 Cup. Fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: brown; beige slip; strong firing.

12. S_21250 Pan (handle) Very fine fabric; colour: grey; beige slip; metal firing. Cf. S_21242.

13. S_21271 Jug (spout). Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip, red paint; strong firing.

14. S_21278 Handle. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip; very strong firing.

15. S_21274 Handle. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip, red paint; strong firing.

16. S_21275 Handle. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip, red paint; strong firing.

SU400 (sherds at level −6.60 m) S_21287–S_21313 *(Pls. 39–41)*

1. S_21290_21316_21345 Amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: yellowish, decoration incised with comb on shoulder; good firing. (Combines the fragments S_21316, S_21290).

2. S_21287 Amphora. Very fine fabric; Diam. 13 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip, red paint; very strong firing. (Combines the fragments S_21362, S_21315, S_21325).

3. S_21294 Amphora. Very fine fabric; Diam. 11 cm; colour: light brown; beige slip; strong firing.

4. S_21302 Small amphora. Very fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing.

5. S_21301 Small amphora. Fine fabric; colour: yellowish, comb decoration; medium firing. (Combines the fragment S_21224).

6. S_21288 Jug. Fine fabric; Diam. 5.5 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip; decorations incised with comb; good firing.

7. S_21303 Small amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 11 cm; colour: light brown; beige slip; strong firing.

8. S_21312 Small amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: light brown; beige slip, red paint; strong firing.

9. S_21311 Small amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip, red paint; strong firing.

10. S_21306 Cup. Very fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip, red paint; strong firing.

11. S_21295 Cup. Fine fabric; Diam. 6.5 cm; colour: pinkish, white paint, bottom with signs of burning; strong firing.

12. S_21310 Cup. Very fine fabric; Diam. 12 cm; colour: pinkish, red paint; very strong firing. (Combines the fragments S_21296 and S_21248).

13. S_21295/1 Handle. Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing.

14. S_21300 Miniature jug. Very fine fabric; Diam. 2 cm; colour: pinkish, decorations incised on shoulder; strong firing.

15. S_21309 Ointment holder (bottom). Very fine fabric; colour: grey; strong firing.

SU401 (sherds accumulated on the bottom) S_21314–S_21327 *(Pl. 42)*

1. S_21321 Amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 13; colour: yellowish, dark red geometric spiral-shaped decoration; strong firing.

2. S_21319 Small amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: light brown; beige slip; strong firing.

3. S_21326 Small amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: yellowish; very strong firing.

4. S_21321/4 Small amphora (foot). Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip; strong firing.

5. S_21324 Small amphora (foot). Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; very strong firing.

6. S_21323 Small amphora (foot). Very fine fabric; colour: grey, red paint; strong firing.

7. S_21327 Small amphora (bottom). Very fine fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip, red paint; metal firing.

SU402 (sherds-bottom) S_21328–S_21364 *(Pls. 43–44)*

1. S_21331 Pot. Medium fabric with small white inclusions; Diam. 10 cm; colour: grey; blackish patina, ribbing on neck, shoulder and belly; strong firing.

2. S_21357 Amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 11 cm; colour: pinkish, grey in cross-section; beige slip; decoration in bands in red paint; strong firing.

3. S_21353 Amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 14 cm; colour: pinkish; beige slip, red paint; very strong firing.

4. S_21355 Amphora. Fine fabric; Diam. 10 cm; colour: pinkish; strong firing.

5. S_21340 Jug. Fine fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: light brown; beige slip; strong firing.

6. S_21349 Jug. Very fine fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: light brown; beige slip, red paint; metal firing.

7. S_21351 Jug. Fine fabric; Diam. 6 cm; colour: light brown; beige slip; very strong firing.

8. S_21350 Small amphora. Granular fabric; Diam. 7 cm; colour: reddish, brown in cross-section; beige slip; strong firing.

9. S_21352 Jug. Very fine fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: pinkish, red paint; very strong firing.

10. S_21356 Jug. Granular fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: brown; strong firing.

11. S_21329 Cup. Very fine fabric; Diam. 8 cm; colour: brown, grey in cross-section; metal firing.

12. S_21338 Amphora (bottom). Granular fabric; colour: light brown; beige slip; strong firing.

13. S_21361 Jug (spout). Fine fabric; colour: pinkish; beige slip, red paint; strong firing.

14. S_21359 Pot. Fine fabric; colour: reddish, brown in cross-section; very strong firing.

2.2.2 Conclusions

The Amphorae found in cistern no. 8 show generally very pure or finely granular fabric and are of a pinkish colour with an external beige slip and very strong firing. Numerous sherds show the typical geometric and abstract decoration in red typical of the *red-painted ware* of the Umayyad-Abbasid period already recalled for the finds in room no. 103. Specimens with an incised decoration used in the Byzantine period are absent. Worthy of note is an Amphora with a very long neck and rim reinforced by a band (Pl. 39, no.1) which finds comparison at the monastery of ‘Ain Kanisah[266] and above all in the ecclesiastical complexes of Umm er-Rasas[267] and Amman[268]. The small amphorae, very numerous, show decorations with sinuous bands on the neck and on the shoulder, a slightly everted rim and handles with a hexagonal

266 Alliata 1994a, 534 no.2

267 Sanmorì – Pappalardo 1997, 400–401 no. 9a.

268 Harding 1951, fig. 4, 38.

and double ribbed profile (Figs. 105–106; Pl. 32, no. 3; Pl. 35, no. 2, 3, 5; Pl. 42, no. 1; Pl. 43, no. 2). Morphologically the globular shape recurs and, in some cases, a slight fairing appears (Fig. 107; Pl. 39, no. 2). The ensemble of pottery from the cistern contains a specimen of a jug with the usual hole for the spout which unfortunately has been lost (Pl. 41, no. 6). As this was an important element useful for dating, considering its progressive lengthening in the Abbasid phases, particular prudence is necessary in dating. However, the morphological characteristics outlined seem to differentiate the vase from the previous Byzantine vessels, thus suggesting a dating which is ascribed to the late Umayyad period[269]. Lastly, a small miniature jug which has an exact comparison in Pella is interesting, and suggests a dating to the end of the 7th cent. A.D.[270] (Fig. 114; Pl. 41, no. 14).

A bottle that morphologically represents a single piece in the pottery production of Mount Nebo agrees in the same type of fabric and decoration with the small amphorae described previously (Fig. 108; Pl. 37, no. 1). Amongst the drinking vessels, particular attention should be paid to a flask, preserved in its entirety, characterized by a globular body, a very fine fabric and a very accurate polishing which finds an interesting comparison dated to the beginning of the Abbasid period, from the site of Pella (Fig. 113; Pl. 31, no. 1)[271].

As for the cooking shapes, only one pot shaped on the lathe is attested, with a fairly rounded rim with a dark coloured granular fabric (Fig. 109; Pl. 36, no. 8). Pans are totally absent. This particularity of the pottery lot is probably to be attributed to the peculiar nature of the context where they were found, a cistern, where drinking forms linked to drawing water prevail.

Among the open shapes, there are large basins of truncated-conical shape, characterized by a medium pure fabric of a pinkish-brown colour and with a light-coloured slip (Pl. 29, no. 4; Pl. 30, no. 6; Pl. 33, nos. 2, 3, 4). Highly evident incised decoration is on the walls of the receptacles. The rim, often with a brim, in one case has applied cords (Pl. 33, no. 4).

Cups form a good part of the pottery ensemble and can be divided into three distinct groups. The first comprises the small cups of a hemispherical shape with a very fine fabric and a polish tending to brown which are also found up to the Abbasid period (Pl. 32, no. 4; Pl. 38, no. 11)[272]. The second includes the cups with a truncated-conical shape, characterized by a greater depth, slightly more vertical walls and a slightly everted rim (Pl. 38, no. 10; Fig. 110; Pl. 41, nos. 10, 11, 12). These show the usual red paint on white slip, typical of the last Umayyad period as shown by the cases of Umm-er Rasas[273], Dhiban[274], and Jerash[275]. The last group, certainly the latest, includes a large cup with a truncated-conical shape, a very fine pinkish fabric, often a light-coloured slip and red paint decoration (Fig. 111; Pl. 38, no. 9). The find was restored in its entirety and deserves special mention for the aesthetic refinement of the decorative motif made up of a band containing a sinuous vine which forms some spirals containing bunches of grapes alternating with large lanceolate leaves. This typology is very common in the excess layers of the site of Umm er-Rasas. The dating proposed, thanks to the numerous comparisons with the material studied by E. Alliata and C. Pappalardo, situated it in the middle of the Abbasid period with a use continuing until the 10th cent. A.D.[276].

The only oil lamp found is of the type with spirals of vine with an almond-shaped body and bottom (Fig. 112; Pl. 36, no. 11). The valves of the oil lamp are particularly crushed and the handle with a truncated-pyramidal and trapezoid shape belongs to the type called “tongue”. The

269 For some comparisons with Umm er-Rasas, see Alliata 1994b, 283–284 no. 95.
270 Smith *et al.* 1992, 177–178 no. 6; pl. 113, 6.
271 Walmsley 1982, 170. 171 no. 1; Walmsley 1988, 155 fig. 8, 2.
272 See in particular the case of Umm er-Rasas in Alliata 1991, 419.
273 In the complex of St Stephen, see Alliata 1991, 370 fig. 3, 3. 396 fig. 17, 3. 398 fig. 18, 11; 18, 21.
274 Tushingham 1972, 40–42, fig. 6.
275 Gawlikowski 1986a, pl. XXII; XIIIb.
276 Alliata 1991, fig. 18, 21; Alliata 1993, 286. Sanmorì – Pappalardo 1997, 422–424 no. 9.

Fig. 105 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8, amphora S_21321.

Fig. 106 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8, amphora S_21357.

fabric is of a light colour and the firing is very strong. The particularly significant decoration represents two *kantharoi* at the sides of the *infundibulum* and other plant elements. The decorative pattern has comparisons above all in the area of Jerusalem, as shown by some specimens recovered during the excavation of the Probatic Pool in the Holy City[277] and at the site of Khirbet el-Mafjar[278]. The morphological and typological characteristics ascribe the lamp to the middle of the Abbasid period (late 8th – early 9th cent. A.D.) when the archaeological site was frequented at its latest[279].

277 Arndt 1987, 264–268 nos. 94–99; figs. 6–7.
278 Baramki 1944, pl. XVIII no. 3.
279 Da Costa 2001, 255 no. 9. See also Daviau – Beckmann 2001, 259–274 on the subject.

Fig. 107 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8, small amphora S_21287 _21315_21325.

Fig. 108
Memorial of Moses.
Cistern no. 8, bottle
S_21259.

Fig. 109 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8, cooking pot S_21237.

Fig. 110 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8, cup S_21295.

Fig. 111 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8, cup S_21258_21360.

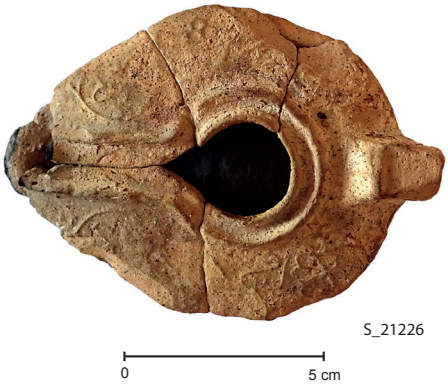

Fig. 112 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8, oil lamp S_21226.

Fig. 113 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8, flask S_21200_21240_21292.

Fig. 114 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8, miniature jug S_21300.

Fig. 115 Memorial of Moses. Cistern no. 8, small amphora S_21262_21294.

PART II:
HISTORICAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE MONASTIC COMPLEX OF MOUNT NEBO

3. THE SHRINES OF BIBLICAL FIGURES BEYOND THE RIVER JORDAN

Monastic shrines linked to the Old Testament figures which arose beyond the River Jordan testify the Christian devotion to these characters[280] (Fig. 116). Amongst the Biblical episodes, the Exodus occupies an important place as it was the journey made by the Jewish people who, in their flight from Egypt, journeyed through these territories until they reached the plains of the land of Moab from where they could contemplate the Promised Land[281].

After reflecting in the first two chapters on the new archaeological data of the Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo, the main subject of this book, it is now important to focus on the other monastic shrines that were located in the region beyond the River Jordan. The analysis of the individual monastic foundations, through textual sources and monumental evidence, allows several architectonic and devotional analogies to be highlighted; these have to be interpreted with a holistic approach in order to be able to understand their topographical structure and their chronological development, as useful aspects for comparison with the monastery on Mount Nebo.

Particular attention is paid to the network of roads taken by pilgrims to visit these monasteries and how they are part of a larger system of interconnected places of worship.

3.1 ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MONASTIC SHRINES IN JORDAN

The presence of monastic settlements in the territories of Jordan is shown by numerous literary and epigraphic sources from the 4th cent. A.D.[282], in connection with the wider monastic phenomenon, widespread first in Egypt and then throughout the Holy Land with its epicentre in the regions of the Judean Desert[283].

A first specification concerns the dual typology of the Jordanian monasteries: on the one hand, small and medium complexes are attested in rural settings, while on the other, large monastic complexes existed near the holy sites[284]. Unlike the rural monasteries, the organization of which was connected both to an initial conversion of the local communities and to the subsequent territorial administration of ecclesiastical possessions, the large shrines with monasteries depended closely on the geographical place in which they were located[285]. For this reason they were characterized by an architectonic typology due to the topographical particularities of the site and the specific functions of devotion and accommodation to which they were destined. The main element that differentiated the monastic shrines from other monasteries is represented precisely by the frequentation of the faithful and the strong association which was created between monks and pilgrims[286].

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280 For an extensive discussion of the topic, in particular for the history of studies with numerous epigraphic references, see MacDonald 2000.

281 Deut. 34, 1–12. For further information on the possible itineraries of the Exodus, see MacDonald 2000, 63–100 and specifically for Mount Sinai Kaswalder 2010, 44–51.

282 For more on the topic, see Piccirrillo 1992 and Hamarneh 2012.

283 The subject of monasticism in Palestine has been extensively studied. For a historical and chronological framing, see at least Patrich 1995; Bitton-Ashkelony – Kofsky 2006a, 264–265; Marazzi 2015, 9–25.

284 Most of the monastic testimonies are located in a rural context, mainly made up of monastic chapels standing in villages. For more on the subject, see Hamarneh 2003, 195–209 and for an update Hamarneh 2012.

285 The phenomenon in the Palestinian region is well studied; see in this regard Taxel 2008 and Ashkenazi 2014.

286 Whiting 2016, 108.

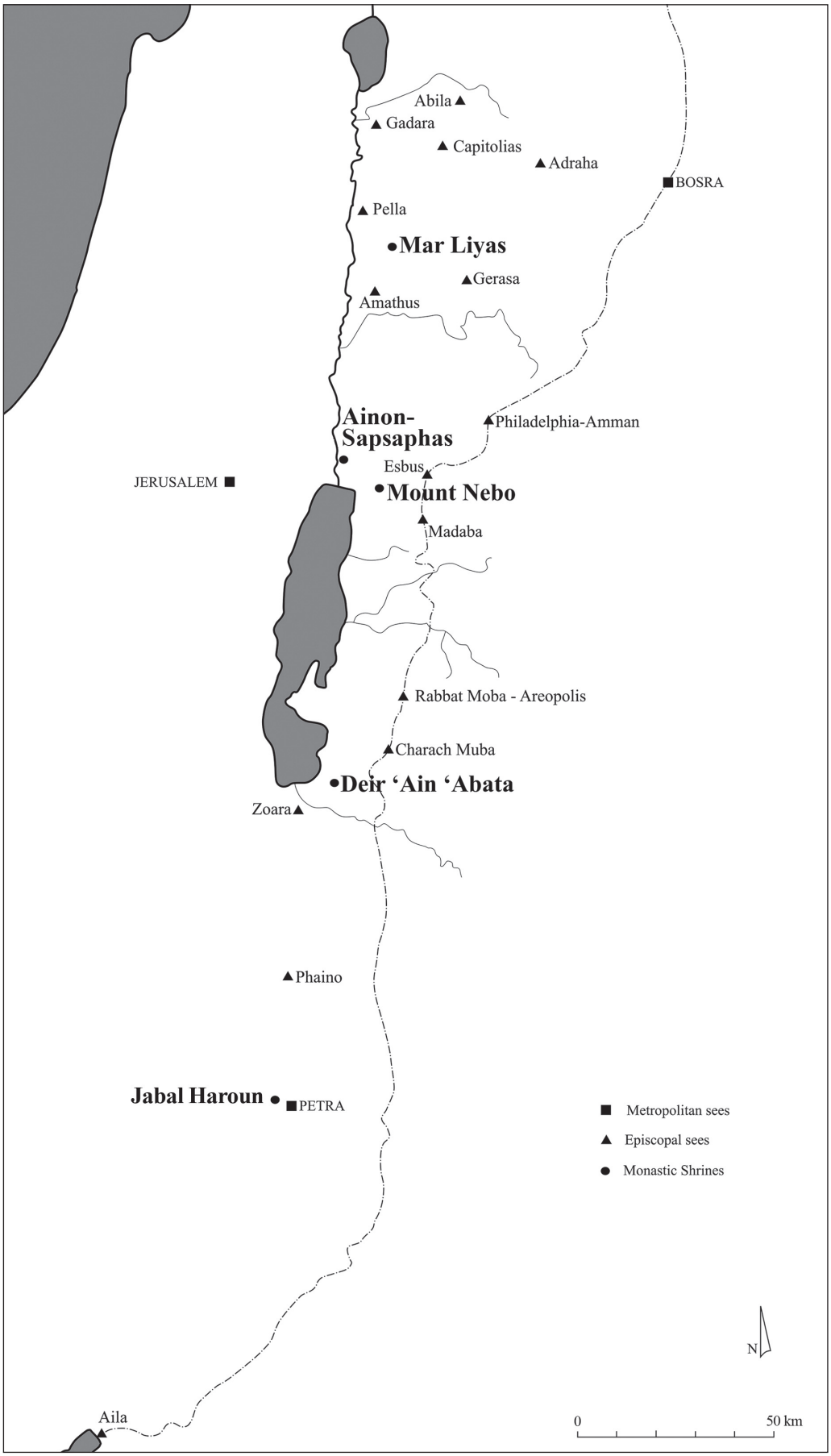

Fig. 116 Map showing the monastic shrines beyond the River Jordan.

A correct approach to the origin of the Biblical memorials in Jordanian monastic complexes places attention on the subject of the so-called *inventiones*, i.e. those discoveries of tombs or relics connected with the figures from the Old and New Testaments. The fundamental background is to be sought in the fact that the holy places were given great value by the Emperor Constantine, following the promulgation of the edict of religious tolerance in A.D. 313. In the first decades of the 4th cent. A.D., intense building, often with direct imperial involvement, occurred in a number of important places connected with the life of Christ[287]. Among the earliest examples, we can mention the two Constantinian basilicas of Jerusalem and Bethlehem in which the topographical element legitimized the worship and represented that guarantee of faith and tradition for the Christian devotee[288].

In addition to the evangelical places, Christian religious veneration concerned some sites linked to Old Testament episodes. In particular, from its origins, the monastic movement privileged those important charismatic figures who, through their lives and teachings, were a model of reference for the first communities of monks. As early as the 4th cent. A.D., Anthony the Great and Jerome identified in the life of the prophet Elijah, above all during his period of solitary retreat, those important qualities to which monks should aspire for the quest of ascetic virtues[289]. These positive elements distinguished the hermitic manifestations at the dawn of monasticism[290] and numerous Biblical figures[291] were quoted in hagiographic literature to exemplify the fundamental monastic virtues: hospitality, peace and humility[292]. In the territories on the other side of the River Jordan, the first monks settled in the places that recalled the work and the life of those Biblical figures who had lived there or passed through: Moses on Mount Nebo, his brother Aaron on the top of Mount Hor near Petra, the prophet Elijah near Thisbe and his ascension close to the Jordan, and lastly the patriarch Lot in the valley of Zoara.

Specific references to the Biblical memories are already seen from the 4th cent. A.D. both from the travelogues of the first Christian pilgrims to the provinces of *Arabia* and *Palaestina* and from the transient epigraphic and monumental evidence. In particular, the descriptions of the shrines given in the *Itinerarium Egeriae* reflect a panorama of building still being formed, where often the pilgrim recognized only simple buildings or natural elements such as grottoes or heights[293]. The social component which accompanies the topography of these sites was made up of hermits willing to welcome and guide pilgrims. We can therefore consider that in this first phase the sites under examination still lacked an elaborate architecture for the life of the monks and worship, with perhaps the exception of Mount Nebo on the top of which Egeria recalls the presence of an *ecclesia non grandis* but without a stable religious community[294].

At a later stage, from the end of the 5th cent. A.D., but above all from the start of the 6th cent. A.D., the evolution of these complexes was intertwined with the establishment of devotional practices, increasingly widespread in the urban and rural *martirya* which became very popular thanks to the political stability promoted by the Emperors Anastasius I (491–518), Justin (518–527) and Justinian (527–565)[295]. This veneration was linked precisely to the miraculous *inventiones* of remains or memories of saints, martyrs and figures from the Old and New

287 On the subject, see Ousterhout 1990, 108–124 and Ousterhout 2008, 47–58.

288 For an updated study of the Constantinian complexes see Ciliberto 2012 with bibliography.

289 Krueger 2010, 199. For the numerous monastic settlements dedicated to the prophet Elijah, see Janin 1975, 143–146.

290 In general, for the first phases of the monastic movement, see Mango 2008, 158–182; for the Palestinian region, see Perrone 2012, 6–46.

291 As well as Elijah mentioned above, Abraham, Moses, David and Daniel are recalled.

292 The main episodes are recalled in the passages in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* where these virtues are recalled in connection with the main Biblical figures mentioned above. For an updated bibliography, see Krueger 2010, 199.

293 In particular at the sites of Bethany, Nebo and Sinai, the pilgrim explicitly recalls ecclesiastical buildings.

294 It. Eg. 12, 1.

295 For a development of the subject, see Hamarneh 2014, 124–126.

Testaments[296]. The narrative pattern which recurs in the hagiographic texts often involved a main character, whether ecclesiastical or lay, who through a dream or a vision came into contact with the saint, who reveals to him the place of his burial. This was followed by the interest of a religious authority, often episcopal, which ordered the search for the relics or the tomb and the edification of a place of worship[297].

As L. Di Segni rightly points out, this practice was widespread in Palestine, in many eastern provinces and even in Italy and Gaul[298] and the sources, in particular Eusebius of Caesarea and the Anonymous Pilgrim of Bordeaux recall the tombs of many Biblical figures[299]. However, if in almost all the regions of the Byzantine Empire, the *inventiones* were mainly linked to local figures such as martyrs, in the provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia* the miraculous "finds" also concerned figures from the Old and New Testaments and were often located near earlier pagan tombs, some dated even to the Iron Age[300]. As will be seen in detail, these patterns reflect the origin of some memorials in Jordan. In particular, for the case of Mount Nebo and the shrine of Elijah-John the Baptist at Wadi al-Kharrar, the site was identified thanks to a dream, while the edification of the monastic complex dedicated to the patriarch Lot (venerated in a natural cavity, the oldest finds of which date back to the Bronze Age) and of the monastery dated to St Aaron (which stands on a previous Nabatean shrine) is linked to the cultural continuity of the place[301].

It should not be forgotten, however, that the existence of an initial nucleus of hermits in a specific Biblical place could encourage the arrival of new monks and the edification of a monastery supported by a charismatic "holy man" who thus became its founder as well as, after his death, often the reason of veneration[302]. One example is the complex of Mount Nebo, where in addition to the memory of the Biblical prophet, Peter the Iberian mentioned an Egyptian monk of great moral rigour and wisdom[303]. This element must therefore be taken into consideration for a correct understanding of the monastic complexes: the reasons for pilgrimage could be both the veneration of the Biblical figures as well as of holy monks, and opportune architectonic solutions depended on these circumstances to mark out the individual funerary structures. Moreover, the devotion of the faithful was not limited to monasteries alone: many churches in Jordan were dedicated to saints, local martyrs and in rare cases also to Biblical figures near a town or a village where the population was particularly active in the preservation of the tradition of worship both on a local and international basis[304]. This practice reflected the jurisdictional autonomy of these churches which were not integrated into the diocesan administrative system until the middle of the 6th cent. A.D[305].

Returning to the development and to the particular structure of the monasteries under examination, from the second half of the 6th cent. A.D., the church represented the real heart of the

296 On this issue, see in particular Di Segni 2006–2007, 381–401; Chavarría 2011, 32–34.
297 Chavarría 2011, 32–34.
298 Di Segni 2006-2007, 381 and the extensive bibliography in notes 1 and 2.
299 In the *Onomasticon* the tomb of Abraham in Hebron, the tomb of David and his father Jesse in Bethlehem, that of Lazarus in Bethany, of Joshua near Thamnatsare, of Habakkuk in Gabatha, of Rachel and Ephrata near Bethlehem, of Amos in Thecoa, of Habakkuk in Kela, and of Miriam, the sister of Moses in Kadesh Barnea. For the references, see Di Segni 2006-2007, 386 note 22.
300 Di Segni 2006-2007, 386.
301 Fiema 2012.
302 On the figure of the holy monk in the late ancient period, the work of Brown 1971 is fundamental. See also the interesting reinterpretation by Ashkenazi 2014.
303 Joh. Rufus, V. Petri Ib. 83–85.
304 In addition to the shrines that arose near the monastic complexes, a church was dedicated to the prophet Elijah in the city of Madaba; one was dedicated to the patriarch Lot in association with the martyr Procopius in the site of Khirbet el-Mukhayyat, while a church was dedicated to the prophet Isaiah in the territory of Rihab. In this regard, see Piccirillo 1981, 74–75 and Piccirillo 1989a, 67–70. 182–188. For an extensive study of the devotional geography in this area, see Hamarneh 2014, 119–136.
305 Dragon 1979, 44–47; Hamarneh 2014, 124.

monastic complexes, appearing as the barycentre of the religious and lay component of the structure. In this chronological horizon, the archaeological investigations have highlighted restorations and enlargements in all five memorials in Jordan. As well as an artistic and decorative embellishment of the ecclesiastical buildings, often related to the productions of the refined schools of mosaics of the region, new architectonic elements and liturgical furnishings became necessary for the specific devotional practices of the site. Following the model of the contemporary urban and rural churches, in which special reliquaries were placed in the presbytery[306], architectonic structures were built in the monasteries under examination to celebrate the figure to whom the church was dedicated[307]. These elements could be cenotaphs (in the complexes of Nebo and Jabal Haroun) or could constitute the monumentalization of natural elements such as grottoes and rivers specifically quoted in the Biblical tradition (Lot's grotto or the water of baptism of John the Baptist). In addition, the assiduous devotional attendance necessitated a special organization of the various monastic spaces, in order to offer pilgrims assistance and to meet their physical and spiritual needs. The religious welcome had to satisfy the four basic needs of the faithful: food, water, shelter and practices of worship[308]. The monasteries therefore took on opportune areas and architectonic structures to meet these growing demands. The union of these two elements not only represented the guarantee for the success of these shrines[309], but ensured them a long and lasting presence in the territory.

Unfortunately, as often occurs, it is difficult to reconstruct the exact function of the areas which developed around the building of worship from the limited archaeological remains. However, some elements, such as ovens, drains and terraces inform us of the activities of the monks and allow us to state that the monasteries under examination were independent regarding water, food and perhaps also produce. It is also possible that some of these shrines, in particular that of Moses on Mount Nebo and of Aaron on Jabal Haroun fulfilled a function of shelter and healthcare for the ill[310].

The numerous building activities carried out in the five Biblical memorial sites, which we know, thanks to the epigraphic references in the mosaic pavements, also continued in the 7th and 8th centuries A.D., are a reflection of the high level of economic security that had been attained. During their existence, these monastic complexes were defined as important centres in their local areas, not only for the function of the monks as mediators between man and the divine, but also for their social role in relation to the central power, the local communities and the other aristocratic and ecclesiastical elites in the province.

306 An in-depth analysis appears in Duval 1994, 185–188, resumed by Michel 2001, 74–80.
307 For Nebo, see the study by Michel 1998b.
308 Michel 2001, 74–80.
309 Limor 2006, 332–333; Voltaggio 2015, 321–322.
310 On the subject of healthcare in the monasteries in Late Antiquity, see the extensive discussion in Crislip 2005.

3.2 THE PILGRIMAGE ROUTES BEYOND THE RIVER JORDAN

The five Jordanian monasteries under examination arose in a territory which, from the 4th cent. A.D. in union with Palestine, represents the religious centre and the focus of pilgrimage for the entire Christian world. The ecclesiastical authorities, the religious and the pilgrims required an adequate system of roads that would allow them to reach the places of devotion easily. The articulated system of Roman roads, built in the previous centuries for the military and administrative requirements of the empire, answered this need[311].

The focal point of departure and arrival of the religious itineraries in the provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia* was the Holy City of Jerusalem, which had already enjoyed this status since the time of Emperor Constantine (Figs. 117–118). Eusebius himself recalls in *Vita Costantini* that at the end of the Synod of Tyre in A.D. 335, the emperor invited all the bishops to the inauguration of the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and that they reached the city using the itineraries of the *cursus publicus*[312].

The discovery of numerous milestones bearing Latin and Greek inscriptions has enabled the reconstruction of the road system of the region[313], but for a more exact comprehension of monastic geography in Jordan, with the routes taken by pilgrims visiting the holy places, attention has to be given to certain travelogues. The most famous travelogue is the *Itinerarium Egeriae*, written at the end of the 4th cent. A.D. The *Life of Peter the Iberian* by John Rufus (5th cent. A.D.) dwells more specifically on the holy places and on their origin. The archdeacon Theodosius, who wrote in the early 6th cent., recalls in his *De Situ Terrae Sanctae* interesting details about the roads and the distances of the shrines. Of somewhat later date, the itineraries of the Anonymous Pilgrim of Piacenza (second half of the 6th cent.) and of the pilgrim Arculf (second half of the 7th cent.) may also be mentioned.

Thanks to the Umayyad religious policy, which was very clement towards the Christians of the region, and the maintenance of the Byzantine road system by order of the Muslim caliphs, the faithful could continue to reach the places of devotion in the first Islamic period[314] (Fig. 119). Although the altered political and economic situation considerably reduced the flow of pilgrims, many oriental monks and abbots from the Christian West continued to visit and stay at the monastic complexes until the middle of the medieval period. Indeed, we have accounts from the writings of the Epiphanius the Monk (8th cent.), the English Bishop Willibald (late 8th cent.) and lastly the Russian Abbot Daniel who visited the Holy Land in the 12th cent. Information on the mobility of Palestinian monks can also be ascertained from hagiographic sources. The *Spiritual Meadow*, a monastic treatise by John Moschus written between the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th cent. A.D. and the *Life of St Stephen the Sabaite*, written by Leontius of Damascus in Arabic at the end of the 8th cent. A.D., record the peregrinations of certain monks.

From these accounts we learn that the pilgrims did not follow a specific itinerary explicitly for the monasteries in Transjordan, but usually visited them after having been to the main places of evangelical devotion[315]. It should not be forgotten that during the Byzantine period the most important sites for Christians were those linked to the birth, preaching and death of Christ, privileging visits to the cities of Bethlehem, Jerusalem and the territories of Galilee[316].

The visit was thus structured in the different provinces. In particular, in *Palaestina Secunda* to the north, after having journeyed to the places in Galilee and crossed the River Jordan, the

311 For more on accessibility in the provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia*, see Roll 1995 and Roll 1999.
312 Eus. v. C. 4, 43.
313 For the epigraphic studies on the milestones, see Graf 1997.
314 Worthy of note are the milestones with inscriptions in Arabic dating back to the time of the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (A.D. 685–705), see Sharon 1966, 367–372 and Roll 1999, 112.
315 For a detailed study of the itineraries of the pilgrimages Maraval 1985 is fundamental.
316 MacDonald 2010, 25.

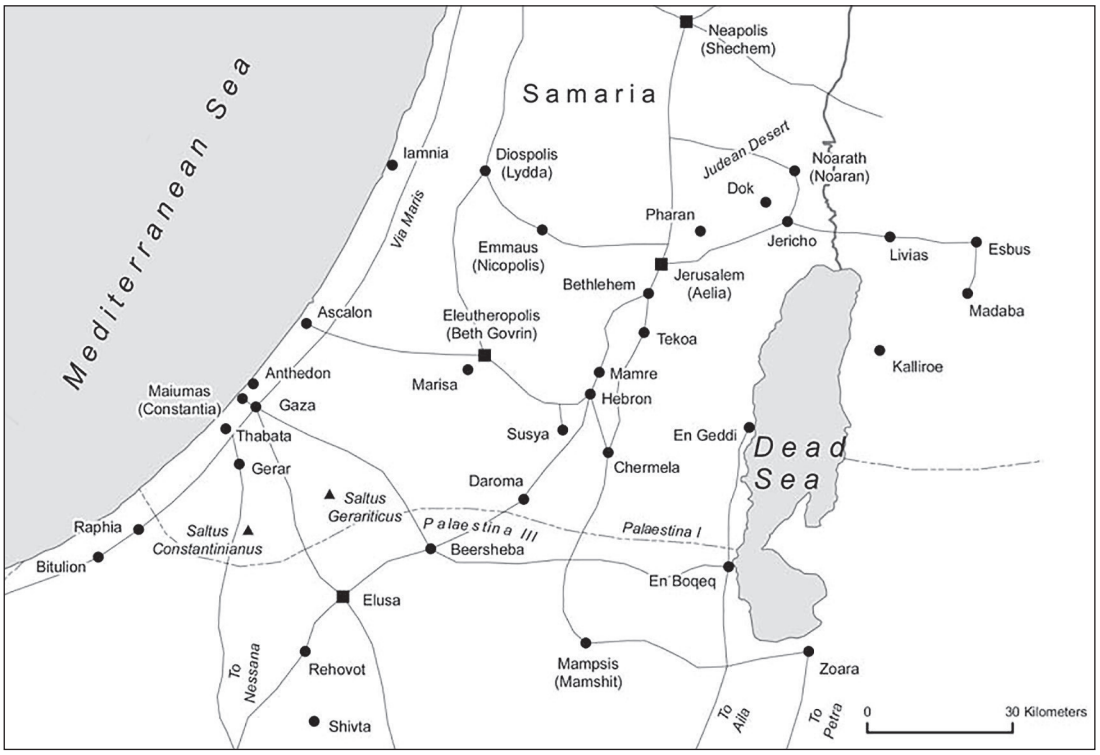

Fig. 117 Roads in Roman and Byzantine times in the provinces of *Palaestina Prima*, *Tertia* and *Arabia* (after Sivan 2008, XVIII, table 2).

Fig. 118 Roads in Roman and Byzantine times in the provinces of *Palaestina Tertia* and in the Sinai (after Sivan 2008, XX, table 4).

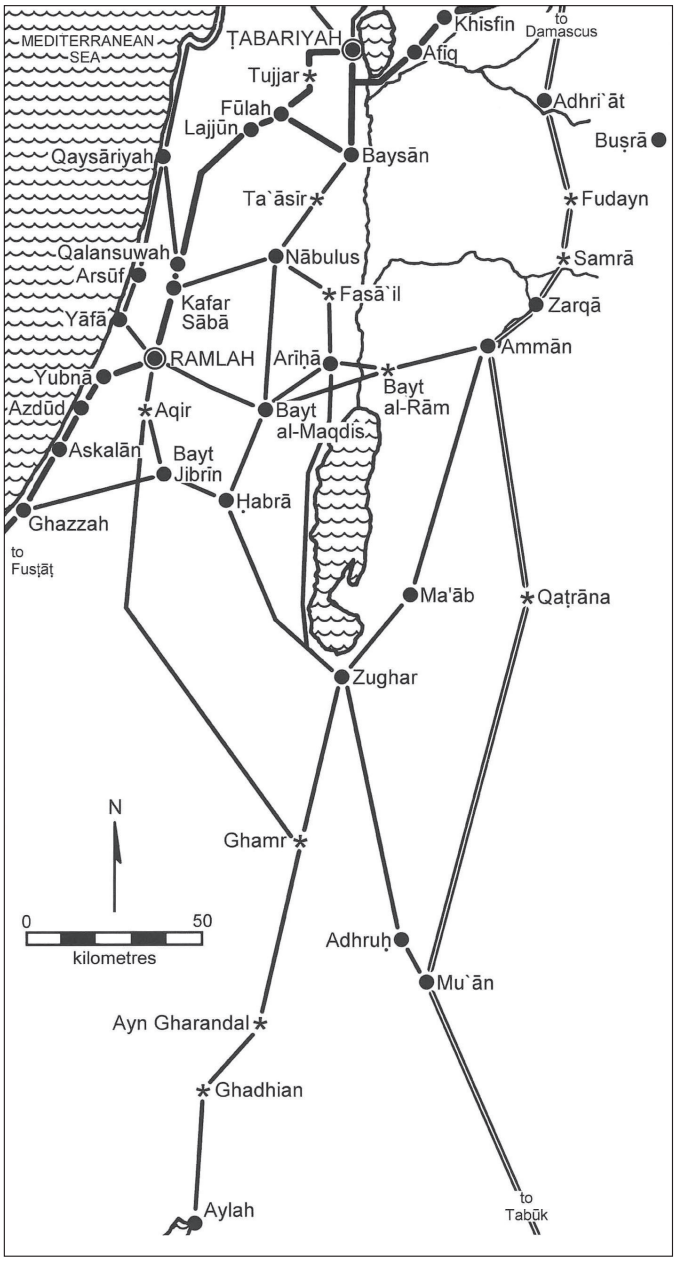

Fig. 119 Roads in the *Jund* of the Islamic period (after Walmsley 2009, 108).

pilgrims could reach the site of Mar Liyas near the village of Thisbe[317]. A compulsory stopping place after having left Jerusalem was the descent to the site of the Baptism and, after crossing the river, the devotees went first to the complex of Sapsaphas then, continuing on the road that linked Jerusalem to Esbus, they could reach a fork which led to the summit of Mount Nebo in the province of *Arabia*[318] (Fig. 117). The shrine of Lot near Deir ‘Ain ‘Abata and that of Jabal Haroun, both in the southern province of *Palaestina Tertia*, were visited by those monks and devotees who, taking the *Via Nova Traiana* towards Ayla-Aqaba went to the Egyptian monastery of Mount Sinai, the real reason for transit in this region[319] (Fig. 118).

317 On the dynamics of the pilgrimage to the monasteries of Galilee, see Ashkenazi – Aviam 2013.
318 Piccirillo 1987.
319 Maraval 1995, 295–297; Roll 1999, 109; Hamarneh 2003, 29–32.

3.3 ANALYSIS OF THE MONASTIC COMPLEXES

3.3.1 The prophet Elijah: shrine of Mar Liyas in the ancient Tishbe

Biblical memories and literary sources

The memorial to the prophet Elijah is today located in the archaeological site of Tall Mar Elyas some 80 km north-west of Amman and 9 km from the city of ʻAjlun[320]. The Biblical text specifies the place of origin of the prophet with the city of Tishbe in the mountainous region of Gilead, east of the Jordan[321]. The primitive Christian tradition indicates the hill near the site of Listib/al-Istib (about 13 km north of the river Jabbok). The toponym, which through a metathesis and an assimilation of the Arabic article with the name, can easily be traced back to the original Tishbe[322]. Christian pilgrimage practices should already have been known at the end of the 4th cent. A.D. as is clear from the words of Egeria, who, coming from the city of Salem, reached the site of Elijah and saw there a cave where tradition recalled the prophet's stay:

> «*Thus, going for a while through the valley of the Jordan, along the bank of that river, as our route was there for a while, we suddenly saw the city of our holy prophet Elijah, that is, Tishbe, from which he had the name of Elijah the Tishbite. There down to this day is the cave in which that holy man sat, and there is the grave of holy Jephtha, whose name we read in the book of Judges*»[323]

Worthy of note is the subsequent step because it would indicate the presence of a hermit, perhaps close to the city of Tishbe. Egeria recalls a hermitage inhabited by a monk in a broad valley which was shown to her as the bed of the Corra River, corresponding to the Biblical stream Cherith and near which the prophet Elijah settled for a short period of time[324]:

> «*Thus, also giving thanks to God there according to custom, we continued our route. Then going on that route, we saw a most pleasant valley coming to us on the left. The valley was immense, sending a great stream into the Jordan. And there in that valley we saw the cell of a certain brother now, that is, a monk. Then, as I am very curious, I began to ask what was this valley where a holy monk had now made a cell; for I did not think this was without a reason. Then the holy ones who were making the journey with us, that is, knowing the place, said to us, "This is the valley of Corra, where holy Elijah the Tishbite lived in the time of King Ahab, when there was a famine and at God's bidding a raven used to bring him food and he used to drink water from that stream. For this stream that you see flowing from that valley into the Jordan, this is Corra.*»[325]

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320 See in detail MacDonald 2010, 81.

321 The main passage in which the origin of the prophet Elijah is attested is in 1 Kings, 17.1, but the epithet "Tishbite" recurs five other times in the Bible (1 Kings, 21.7; 21.28; 2 Kings, 1.3; 1.8; 9.36). This term also reoccurs in later tradition as seen in the version of the LXX, in Josephus Flavius and in Eusebius of Caesarea. For an extensive study of the subject, see Augustinović – Bagatti 1952, 248–249; MacDonald 2010, 71.

322 In this regard, see Augustinović – Bagatti 1952, 252; MacDonald 2000, 204.

323 It. Eg. 16, 1. "*Ac sic ergo euntes aliquandiu per vallem Iordanis super ripam fluminis ipsius, quia ibi nobis iter erat aliquandiu, ad subito vidimus civitatem sancti prophetae Heliae, id est Thesbe, unde ille habuit nomen Helias Thesbites. Inibi est ergo usque in hodie spelunca, in qua sedit ipse sanctus, et ibi est memoria sancti Gethae, cuius nomen in libris Iudicum legimus*" trans. by A. McGowan 2018, 131.

324 1 Kings, 17. 2–6.

325 It. Eg. 16, 2–3. "*Ac sic ergo et ibi gratias Deo agentes iuxta consuetudinem, perexivimus iter nostrum. Item euntes in eo itinere vidimus vallem de sinistro nobis venientem amenissimam, quae vallis erat ingens, mittens torrentem in Iordanem infinitum. Et ibi in ipsa valle vidimus monasterium cuiusdam, fratris nunc, id est monachi. Tunc ego, ut sum satis curiosa, requirere cepi, quae esset haec vallis ubi sanctus, monachus nunc, monasterium sibi fecisset; non enim putabam hoc sine causa esse. Tunc dixerunt nobis sancti, qui nobiscum iter faciebant, id est loci notores: "Haec est vallis Corra, ubi sedit sanctus Helias Thesbites temporibus Achab regis, qua famis fuit, et iusso Dei corvus ei escam portabat, et de eo torrentem aquam bibebat. Nam hic torrens, quem vides de ipsa valle percurrentem in Iordanem, hic est Corra*" trans. by A. McGowan 2018, 131–132.

Unfortunately, Egeria's description contains fairly general geographical references that have suggested to scholars various identifications of the stream Cherith and the route followed by the pilgrim[326]. Subsequent Byzantine tradition, in particular the Anonymous Pilgrim of Piacenza and the monk John Moschus, is inclined to the Wadi Kharrar, while the medieval tradition favours the Wadi Fasail, as Burchardus recalls in the text of the *Peregrinatores Medii Aevi quatuor*[327].

Lastly, the evidence from Jewish sources is also interesting. A. Augustinović and B. Bagatti direct attention to a text written by the rabbi Esthori Haparhi (1280–1355) and which appeared in his *Sefer Kaftor Vaferech* (ספר כפתור ופרח)[328]. The Jewish scholar recalls that north of the city of El-Istib (אל אסתיב) there flowed the Wadi el-Yabi (ואד אליבאיס) and the real name of the valley was Wadi Elyas (ואד אליס)[329].

The archaeological data

The site of Mar Liyas in the mountainous region of 'Ajlun, already the focus of several sporadic surveys[330], was the object of archaeological excavations in 1999 by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. The complex is made up of two churches, a series of tombs associated with the building of worship, a baptistery and some rooms placed south of the main church which could be associated with a small monastery which developed on the rocky slope of the hill (Fig. 120).

At a lower level (922 m.a.s.l.) there is the small church with a three-apse presbytery dug out directly in the rocky slope[331] (Fig. 121). Along the southern side there opened a room in which a series of tombs were identified. From this level, it was possible to reach a large oval courtyard on an upper terrace that very probably was the place where the pilgrims and the faithful assembled before entering the basilica (Fig. 122). A cistern has been identified in the centre of the courtyard[332].

The top of the hill, at 946 m.a.s.l., is occupied by a basilica which develops for a length of 40 m in an east-west direction and for a width of 26.50 m in a north-south direction[333]. The church had a portico with columns in front of the narthex, which was characterized at the northern end by a small exedra and by three accesses[334]. The hall was divided into three naves and ended with the presbytery raised by a step and ending with an inscribed apse. The *bema* had at its sides two lateral *pastophoria* placed at a lower level[335]. Two series of columns divided the hall into three naves, which then become five in the last phase as shown by the discovery of two further rows of bases of columns in the centre of the lateral naves[336]. The capitals in Corinthian style are plundered material from a previous building and are decorated with deeply engraved acanthus leaves. From the architectonic point of view, the two apses placed opposite one another, at the centre of the lateral walls of the building, are characterized as unique in the panorama of Byzantine buildings in Jordan.

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326 The exact identification of the Corra River remains debated. Precisely in reference to the vicinity suggested by Egeria, many scholars are inclined towards Wadi el-Yabis, although the monk John Moschus says that the Corra is on the left of Sapsas, probably referring to Wadi al-Kharrar. In this regard see, Wilkinson 2002, 293; MacDonald 2010, 74.

327 It. Plac. 165; Jo. Mos. prat. 1, 5; Peregrinatores Medii Aevi quatuor 57–58.

328 Augustinović – Bagatti 1952, 251–252; see also Clermont-Ganneau 1880–1897, II, 139.

329 Augustinović – Bagatti 1952, 251–252.

330 In particular, the region of 'Ajlun was the object of systematic explorations by G. Schumacher published in Steuernagel 1925.

331 The excavations of the small church were carried out in 2003. See Piccirillo 2007, 99 and MacDonald 2010, 75.

332 Piccirillo 2007, 99 and MacDonald 2010, 75.

333 For the measurements of the basilica, reference was made to the data from the studies of M. Piccirillo who made an attentive survey of the complex. See in this regard Piccirillo 2007, 99 and Piccirillo 2011, 106.

334 Piccirillo 2007, 99.

335 Piccirillo 2007, 99.

336 Piccirillo 2011, 107.

Fig. 120 Mar Liyas. Aerial photo of the monastic complex (© APAAME).

Fig. 121 Mar Liyas. Small church with a three-apse presbytery.

The entire sacred building contained elegant mosaic pavements. In the central nave they are placed in two panels side by side. The mosaic to the east, towards the presbytery, displayed a network of rhombuses, while the one to the west was decorated with a plant subject. The whole, unfortunately almost totally lost due to the subsequent military occupations of the church, was surrounded by a band of mosaic with a decorative motif of swastikas[337] (Fig. 123). The northern nave was paved with five mosaic panels, the central one of which, made up of a geometric pattern framed by a series of three-pointed corollas, faced the lateral apse[338] (Fig. 124). The southern nave was decorated with two mosaic panels of different dimensions; in the one facing the western door, bearing a motif with stylized flowers, there is a Greek inscription in seven lines with letters in white tesserae on a red background (Fig. 125). The text, unfortunately damaged and therefore incomplete, has the name of the presbyter Sabaa, an invocation to Christ with a prayer to Elijah and above all the date of execution of the mosaic of A.D. 622/623, the period linked to the Persian occupation of the provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia*[339].

Against the northern wall of the church were two communicating rooms: the one to the west contained the baptistery; the other an apse chapel which ended at the rear in correspondence with the protruding apse of the church[340]. The two rooms were covered in mosaics: in particular in the baptistery, the north panel is decorated with stylized flowers, while to the south there is a geometric motif with a series of circles knotted and joined to one another[341]. The mosaic

337 Piccirillo 2007, 99.

338 Piccirillo 2007, 99.

339 The mosaic inscription reads: "[Made by] Sabaa the priest ... Lord God have mercy on him and his spouse ... St Elijah ... in the year 686" L. Di Segni draws attention to the important element of the dating. Although it is believed that the calculation must be made taking A.D. 63 as a base, given the foundation of the city of Pella and starting year of the chronological system used in all the territory subject to this polis, a recent study by A. Stein, as well as the inscription found in Khirbet al-Tantur are inclined towards A.D. 64. In this regard, see Piccirillo 2011, 108–109, fig. 9.

340 Piccirillo 2007, 99.

341 Piccirillo 2007, 99.

Fig. 122 Mar Liyas. Aerial photo of the monastic church (© APAAME).

Fig. 123 Mar Liyas. Basilica, central nave, eastern mosaic.

inscription in four lines near the western side of the baptismal font is noteworthy as it mentions a donor[342].

A group of rooms adjacent to the southern side of the basilica, and a wine-producing facility decorated with a mosaic of white tesserae were built on the slope of the mountain[343]. These rooms functioned as a small monastic complex as shown by the mosaic inscription in the centre of a square room of the complex (Fig. 126). The text in ten lines is surrounded by a round medallion decorated with a two-strand cord motif: the letters appear somewhat rough while the presence of tesserae of different dimensions indicates a restoration[344]. The text provides the indication of the name of the hegumen of the monastery, of a local merchant who financed the mosaic and the date of execution in June or July of the 14th indication of the year 838 of Pella, corresponding to June or July of A.D. 775/776[345].

The presence of donors or other outstanding figures who gravitated towards the monastery is also attested in the small funerary complex developed in the area south-east of the basilica[346]. Three tombs were built in an underground chamber and could be reached after passing through an entrance with an architrave decorated with mosaic and going down a staircase with nine steps cut directly into the rock. Other dead were placed inside four tombs in trenches dug into the rock chamber to the east[347]. The water supply for the complex was guaranteed by seven

342 The inscription near the baptistery reads: "+Offer of he of whom you o Lord + know the name for the forgiveness of sins and for a wish for long days+". It is noteworthy that the cross of closure became a Christogram. See Piccirillo 2007, 100.

343 Piccirillo 2007, 100.

344 For the epigraphic analyses, see Di Segni 2006–2007, 579.

345 The translated text of the inscription is: "With the help of Christ, the mosaic pavement has been laid under Esion (?), the most God-loving priest and abbot, by the care of John, pulse merchant, for the succour of himself and (his) wife and his children, in the month of June (or July) of the 14th indiction, year 838 [of the city] of Pe[l]la (?)". Di Segni 2006–2007, 580.

346 Piccirillo 2007, 100; Piccirillo 2011, 109–110; Hamarneh 2014, 366.

347 MacDonald 2010, 79.

Fig. 124 Mar Liyas. Basilica, northern nave, central mosaic panel.

Fig. 125
Mar Liyas. Basilica, southern nave, mosaic panel with inscription.

Fig. 126
Mar Liyas. Monastic room, mosaic panel with inscription.

wells and cisterns connected to a system of channels developed around the church and made up of stone pipes faced with plaster[348].

The different building phases of the monastic complex of Mar Liyas are today still only hypothetical. B. MacDonald, on the basis of material data provided by archaeologists, indicates a first late Roman phase to which the wine-producing facility and the pottery found in the excavation of the northern *pastophorion* are believed to belong, followed by the construction of the small church in the 6th cent. A.D.[349]. For the basilica we have the evidence of the dedicatory inscription in the mosaic of the southern nave, which as seen suggests restoration work on the mosaic, or even complete rebuilding of the church in A.D. 622/623, at the height of the Persian occupation of the provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia*[350]. The mosaic inscription found in the monastery informs us, finally, of building activity in A.D. 775/776 and, consequently, of a Christian monastic community that was still very active after the second half of the 8th cent. A.D.

What is certainly clear is that the monastic complex that stood on the hill near the village of Listib/al-Istib was visited by a growing number of pilgrims who went there to commemorate the place connected with the birth of the prophet Elijah. Although the archaeological data are still incomplete, it appears obvious that a possible presence of hermits, suggested by the pilgrim Egeria, was followed by the installation of a monastic community of the coenobitic type. The numerous burial places and accessories found would indicate the possible presence of graves of outstanding figures, as well as those for the monks, who wanted to be buried near the church that commemorated the prophet Elijah and therefore were willing to contribute economically to the wealth of the monastery.

3.3.2 The prophet Elijah: shrine in the Wadi al-Kharrar-Sapsaphas

The archaeological site of Bethany beyond the Jordan represents an important place for Christian pilgrims as it is linked to several Biblical episodes both in the Old and New Testaments. It is here that both the ascension to heaven by Elijah[351] (and according to some sources the prophet's taking shelter in the Cherith stream)[352], and the work of John the Baptist in his activity as Precursor of the Messiah and baptiser of Christ, are commemorated. The association of the two Biblical figures is clearly evident in many passages of the Gospels and therefore it is no coincidence that their memories are associated in the same topographical context[353].

Without going into the questions on the identification of the site of the Baptism, after a brief, but indispensable textual and archaeological introduction for correctly contextualizing the site, attention will be paid to the monastic complex linked to the ascension of the prophet Elijah.

The first important distinction concerns the differentiation of the two shrines of Bethany which developed on the opposite banks of the River Jordan, as is clear both from the recent archaeological investigation and from the topographic documents, in particular the famous mosaic map of Madaba[354]. This iconographic document has two different toponyms: Bethabara on the west bank where St John the Baptist used to baptize and Ainon-Sapsaphas on the east bank where Christ was baptized[355]. Corresponding to the latter site is the mouth of a tributary of

348 MacDonald 2010, 79.
349 MacDonald 2010, 78.
350 B. MacDonald reports the presence of mosaic fragments placed under the inscribed mosaic which could belong to the first basilica, perhaps of the 4th cent. A.D. The impossibility of directly observing the excavation data makes me exercise extreme caution in suggesting dating. See MacDonald 2010, 79, but also Piccirillo 2007, 100.
351 2 Kings, 2.11.
352 See in the text 133–134. 141.
353 Matthew 17.10–13; Mark 9.11–13; Luke 1.17.
354 Piccirillo – Alliata 1999, 50. 55.
355 Piccirillo – Alliata 1999, 218–221; Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 195–196; MacDonald 2010, 84–89; Piccirillo 2016, 127–137.

the Jordan, the Wadi al-Khrarrar, which, winding harmoniously towards the interior, encounters numerous hermitages of monks and two kilometres later, Tell al-Kharrar[356].

Biblical memories and literary sources

Whilst privileging here the settlements of a monastic nature of Wadi al-Kharran, it is significant to examine the textual sources in their entirety to better trace the evolution of the site of Bethany. The accounts by a large number of pilgrims mention the place where John the Baptist used to baptize and some of them also mention the hill linked to the Ascension of the prophet Elijah. The oldest attestations of the name Bethany, yet corrected to Bethabara, are found in Book VI of the *Commentary on the Gospel of John* by Origen[357] and in the *Onomasticon* by Eusebius of Caesarea[358]. These authors, however, restricted themselves only to the evangelical memory of John the Baptist. The first real account of the Ascension of Elijah is provided by the Anonymous Pilgrim of Bordeaux, who came to visit Jerusalem in A.D. 333:

> «*Five miles from there in the Jordan is the place where the Lord was baptized by John, and above the far bank at the same place is the hillock from which Elijah was taken to heaven*.»[359]

The note of the *burdigalense* traveller, although brief, is significant precisely for the indication of the hill of Elijah.

Egeria's text deserves particular attention, especially in connection with what was stated previously for the shrine of Mar Lyias (*Itinerarium Egeriae,* XVI, 2–3). If the Cherith stream mentioned by the pilgrim is identified with the Wadi al-Kharrar, then the *monasterium* seen by Egeria could be part of that group of hermitages inhabited by monks in the region of the Jordan[360]. However, there is no specific mention of the place of the Ascension of Elijah in the *Itinerarium Egeriae*.

A richer description of the monastic structures is, on the other hand, provided by the pilgrim Theodosius who visited these places in A.D. 530:

> «*At the place where my Lord was baptized is a marble column, and on top of it has been set an iron cross. There also is the Church of Saint John Baptist, which was constructed by the Emperor Anastasius. It stands on great vaults which are high enough for the times when the Jordan is in flood. The monks who reside at this Church each receive six shillings a year from the Treasury for their livelihood. Where my Lord was baptized there is on the far side of the Jordan the "little hill" called Hermon — Mount Tabor is in Galilee — where Saint Elijah was taken up. The tomb of Saint Elisha is there at the place where he blessed the spring, and a church has been constructed over the tomb. It is five miles from the place where my Lord was baptized to the point where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea. This Dead Sea is the one where Sodom and Gomorrah were engulfed, with the other three which made up the five cities beside the Dead Sea. Lot's Wife is there who became a pillar of salt. When the moon waxes she grows, and when it wanes she shrinks*»[361]

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356 For more on the topographical and geological context, see Waheeb 2016, 17–24.

357 Or. Jo. 40–60. Origen comments John 1.19–28, the replacement of the term is found in chapter 40, 204. For more on this topic, see Simonetti 1999 with an extensive bibliography.

358 Eus. onomast. 58–59. The sacramental and devotional practice of the *imitatio Christi* with the rite of baptism was already common amongst believers in the 3rd cent. A.D. and Eusebius writes that the Emperor Constantine himself wanted to be baptised there. See Eus. v. C. 4, 62, 1–2.

359 It. Burd. 598. "*Inde ad Iordane, ubi Dominus a Iohanne baptizatus est, milia quinque. Ibi est locus super flumen, monticulus in illa ripa, ubi raptus est Helias in caelum.*" trans. by J. Wilkinson 1999, 33.

360 Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 196–197.

361 Thoeod. De Situ, 20. "*In loco ubi Domnus baptizatus est, ibi est una columna marmorea, et in ipsa columna facta est crux ferrea, ibi est et ecclesia sancti Iohannis baptistae, quam fabricavit Anastasius imperator, quae ecclesia*

Theodosius recalls in the text the presence of a marble column surmounted by a cross in the middle of the river, commemorating the place where Christ was baptized, and places the church built by the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius I (A.D. 491–518) on the west bank of the river. Like the Anonymous Pilgrim from Bordeaux before him, he also indicates that the site of the Ascension of Elijah was on the other side of the River Jordan corresponding to a natural piece of high ground. A group of monks had the task of supervising the shrine supported by the imperial treasury, but there is no topographical specification of where the monastery was.

More detailed information can be gained from the words of the Anonymous Pilgrim from Piacenza who visited Bethany in A.D. 570 to celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord. In particular he recalls the localization of the place of the Ascension of Elijah, on the hill known as Hermon, and the indication of the source where the Baptist used to baptize about two miles from the Jordan:

> «*Then we came to the place where the Lord fed the five thousand people with the five loaves. It is a wide plain with olive and palm groves, and from there we arrived at the place where the Lord was baptized. This is the place where the children of Israel made their crossing, and also where the sons of the prophets lost their axe-head, and where Elijah was taken up. In that place is the "little hill of Hermon" mentioned in the Psalm. At the foot of the mountain at seven o'clock in the morning, a cloud forms over the river, and it arrives over Jerusalem at sunrise, about the basilica on Sion and the basilica at Christ's Tomb, the basilica of Saint Mary and Saint Sophia (once the* Praetorium *where Christ's case was heard). Above these places the dew comes down like showers, and sick people collect it. In the hospices all the dishes are cooked in it, and in the places where this dew falls many diseases are cured. For this is the dew of which the Psalmist sings, "Like as the dew of Hermon which fell upon the hill of Sion". In that part of the Jordan is the spring where Saint John used to baptize, which is two miles from the Jordan, and Elijah was in that valley when the raven brought him bread and meat. The whole valley is full of hermits*»[362]

In this text the Anonymous Pilgrim from Piacenza mentions another episode from the Old Testament: the crossing of the River Jordan by the Israelites led by Joshua[363]. He also recalls that this valley, presumably Wadi al-Kharrar, was characterized by a massive monastic presence of the hermitage type and indicates this as the Biblical place where Elijah was fed by the ravens.

In another passage by the pilgrim, we learn of the existence of another monastery, called St John, which stood not far from the place where Christ was baptized. It is described as being

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super cameras maiores excelsa fabricata est pro Iordane, quando implet; in quae ecclesia monachi morantur, qui monachi senos solido sper annum de fisco accipiunt pro vita sua transigenda. Ubi Domnus baptizatus est trans Iordanem, ibi est "mons modicus" qui appellatur Armona: mons Tabor in Galilaea est: ibi sanctus Helias raptus est. Memoria sancti Helysaei ubi fontem illum benedixit, ibi est, et super ipsa memoria ecclesia fabricata est. Ab unde Domnus baptizatus est, usque ubi Iordanis in mare mortuo intrat, sunt milia V, et ipse est maris mortuus, ubi Sodoma et Gomorra dimersae sunt cum aliis tribus, quae quinque civitates fuerunt iuxta mare mortuum. Ibi est uxor Loth, quae facta est statua salis, et quomodo crescit luna, crescit et ipsa, et quomodo minuitur luna, diminuit et ipsa" trans. by J. Wilkinson 2002, 112.

362 It. Plac. 9. "*Deinde venimus in loco, ubi Dominus de quinque panibus et duobus piscibus quinque milia hominum satiavit extra parvulis et mulieribus, extensa campania, oliveta et palmeta. Exinde venimus ad locum, ubi baptizatus est Dominus. In ipso loco filii Israhel transierunt Iordanem et filii prophetarum perdiderunt securem. Et ex ipso loco Helias assumptus est in caelum inique mons Hermon modicus, qui legitur in psalmo. Ad pedes montis ipsius ascendit in fluvio nubes; ora prima, oriente sole Hierusolimam venit super basilicam, quae est in Syon, et super basilicam sanctae Mariae ad sancta Sophia quae fuit praetorium, ubi auditus est Dominus. Super his locis descendit ros sicut pluvia et colligunt eam medici et in ipso quocuntur omnes confectiones per synodochia. Nam multi languores sanantur ibi, ubi cadit ipse ros; ipse est enim ros, de quo propheta canit David: «Sicut ros Hermon, qui descendit in Syon». In illa ripa Iordanis est fons, ubi baptizabat sanctus Iohannes; inde usque Iordane milia duo. In ipsa valle inventus est Helyas, quando ei corvus deferebat panem et carnes. In circuitu autem vallis ipsium multitudo heremitarum*" trans. by J. Wilkinson 2002, 135. The pilgrim dwells on the practice of collecting dew as a curative method in reference to Psalm 133, 3.

363 Joshua 3, 1–17.

very large and characterized by two hospices for the accommodation of pilgrims. This monastic structure would have been on the western bank, presumably in connection with the church built by Anastasius I near the site of Bethabara[364]. M. Piccirillo connects this monastery with the liturgical practice of the celebration of the Epiphany of the Lord according to which on 6th January the assembly of faithful used to gather at the River Jordan in the church built inside the monastery of St John[365].

The pilgrim Arculf, visiting in A.D. 670 in the time of the Umayyad rule, also recalls a large monastery built on the top of a hill in a dominant position with respect to the church dedicated to John the Baptist. The whole of the monastic complex was surrounded by a thick wall:

«*Right at the river's edge stands a small rectangular church which was built, so it is said, at the place where the Lord's clothes were placed when he was baptized. The fact that it is supported on four stone vaults, makes it usable, since the water, which comes in from all sides, is underneath it. It has a tiled roof. This remarkable church is supported, as we have said, by arches and vaults, and stands in the lower part of the valley through which the Jordan flows. But in the upper part there is a great monastery for monks, which has been built on the brow of a small hill nearby, overlooking the church. There is also a church built there in honour of Saint John Baptist which, together with the monastery, is enclosed in a single masonry wall*»[366]

The same distinction of the two places and the relative different toponyms is also recalled on the mosaic map of Madaba (second half of the 6th cent. A.D.) where a *laura* near Ainon and another one in Sapsaphas are indicated[367].

The *Spiritual Meadow* by John Moschus mentions the foundation of the complex of Sapsaphas by two monks in the time of the Patriarch Elijah (A.D. 496–516)[368]:

«*They crossed the river Jordan but before they reached even the first mile-post the elder began to shiver with fever. As he was unable to walk, they found a small cave and went into it so that the elder could rest. He stayed in the cave for three days, scarcely able to move and burning with fever. Then, whilst he was sleeping, he saw a figure who said to him: "Tell me, elder, where do you want to go"? He replied: "To Mount Sinai." The vision then said to him: "Please, I beg of you, do not go there," but as he could not prevail upon the elder, he withdrew from him. Now the elder's fever attacked more violently. Again the following night the same figure with the same appearance came to him and said: "Why do you insist on suffering like this, good elder? Listen to me and do not go there." The elder asked him: "Who then are you"? The vision replied: "I am John the Baptist and that is why I say to you: do not go there. For this little cave is greater than Mount Sinai. Many times did our Lord Jesus Christ come in here to visit me. Give me your word that you will stay here and I will give you back your health." The elder*

364 M. Piccirillo recalls that the monastery of St John, known in Greek as the *Prodromos* and in Arabic as Dayr Mar Yuhanna or Qasr al-Yahud, became the place of identification of the baptism from the 6th cent. A.D., see Piccirillo 2016, 134. L. Di Segni also discusses the subject in relation to the map of Madaba. See Di Segni 1999a, 118–119.

365 The practice was shown in the Georgian calendar of the Church of Jerusalem. See Piccirillo 2016, 134.

366 Adomnan, De Locis Sanctis 2, 16. "*In extremitate uero fluminis quaedam habetur parua quadrata eclesia, in eo, sicut traditur, fundata loco ubi Dominica uestimenta hora illa custodita sunt qua babtizatus est Dominus. Haec .iiii. lapideis suffulta cancris stat super aquas inhabitabilis, quia sub ipsam hinc et inde subintrant aquae. Haec desuper coctili protegitur creta. Inferius uero, ut dictum est, cancris et arcibus sustentata haec talis eclesia in locis inferioribus illius uallis exstat, per quam influit Iordanis fluuius, in superioribus uero locis quoddam inest grande monachorum monasterium, quod supra discriptae supereminet eclesiae in supercilio monticuli e regione constructum, ibidemque et eclesia in honorem sancti babtizatoris Iohannis fundata eodem monasterii circumdatur muro quadratis constructo lapidibus.*" trans. by J. Wilkinson 2002, 191. For a description of the other monumental evidence seen by Arculf, see Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 199; MacDonald 2010, 95.

367 Alliata 1999a, 50–51, notes 26. 54.

368 See in particular Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 199–200.

accepted this with joy and gave his solemn word that he would remain in the cave. He was instantly restored to health and stayed there for the rest of his life. He made the cave into a church and gathered a brotherhood together there; the place is called Sapsas. Close by it and to the left is the Wadi Chorath to which Elijah the Tishbit was sent during the drought; it faces the Jordan»[369]

An important reference to the rocky hermitages spread in the Jordan valley comes from the text of the monk Epiphanius (second half of the 7th – first half of the 8th cent. A.D.). He describes the alleged cave in which John the Baptist would have lived. Noteworthy is the accurate description of the interior of the hermitage in which the pilgrim saw a natural shelf that he interprets as a bed, a small chamber and a spring:

«*And by the little track which goes down from the Holy City to the River Jordan it is twenty-four miles, all down hill. The spring of Meras is there, and, about three miles beyond the Jordan a cave in which lived the Forerunner. There too is the bed on which he slept, a natural shelf in the rock of the cave, and a small chamber. Inside the cave is a sound of water, and in the room is a spring in which holy John the Forerunner used to baptise*»[370]

Welcoming pilgrims to the monastery on the top of the *tell* was still practised towards the end of the 8th cent. A.D., as Epiphanius, who spent a night there, recalls[371].

The last mention of the monastic complex, inhabited by about twenty monks, dates back to A.D. 754, when the Bishop Willibald of Eichstätt went to visit the River Jordan to celebrate the feast of the Epiphany and stayed at the monastery:

«*Departing thence, they came to Caesarea, where there was a church and a great number of Christians. They rested there for a short time and set out for the monastery of Saint John the Baptist, where about twenty monks were living. They stayed the night and then went forward about a mile to the Jordan, where our Lord was baptized. At this spot there is now a church built high up on columns of stone; beneath the church, however, the ground is dry. On the very place where Christ was baptized and where they now baptize there stands a little wooden cross: a little stream of water is led off and a rope is stretched over the Jordan and tied at each end. Then on the feast of the Epiphany the sick*

369 Jo. Mos. prat. 1. "Καὶ διαβάντος τὸν Ἰορδάνην ποταμὸν, ὡς ἀπὸ σημείου ἑνὸς, ἤρξατο φρικιᾷν ὁ γέρων καὶ πυρέσσειν. Ὡς δὲ οὐκ ἐδύνατο περιπατῆσαι, εὗρον σπήλαιον μικρὸν, καὶ εἰσῆλθον ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸς τὸ ἀνεθῆναι τὸν γέροντα. Ὡς δὲ ἐπέμενε πυρέσσων καὶ μήτε κινηθῆναι σχεδὸν δυνάμενος (ἐποίησε γὰρ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ σπηλαίῳ), θεωρεῖ ὁ αὐτὸς γέρων καθ' ὕπνους τινὰ λέγοντα αὐτῷ· Εἰπὲ, γέρων, ποῦ θέλεις ὑπάγειν; Λέγει δὲ τῷ φανέντι αὐτῷ· Εἰς τὸ Σινᾶ ὄρος. Λέγει αὐτῷ· Μὴ, παρακαλῶ, μὴ ἀπέλθῃς. Ὡς δὲ οὐκ ἔπεισε τὸν γέροντα, ἀνεχώρησε ἀπ' αὐτοῦ. Ὁ δὲ πυρετὸς πλέον ἐπετίθετο τῷ γέροντι. Πάλιν δὲ τῇ ἐπιούσῃ νυκτὶ, ὁ αὐτὸς παρίσταται αὐτῷ, τῷ αὐτῷ σχήματι, λέγων· Τί θέλεις, καλόγηρε, κοπωθῆναι; ἄκουσόν μου, καὶ μηδαμοῦ ἀπέλθῃς. Ἔφη αὐτῷ ὁ γέρων· Αὐτὸς γάρ τίς εἶ; Ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῷ ὁ φανείς· Ἐγώ εἰμι Ἰωάννης ὁ Βαπτιστής· καὶ διὰ τοῦτό σοι λέγω, μηδαμοῦ ἀπέλθῃς· τὸ γάρ σπήλαιον τὸ μικρὸν τοῦτο μεῖζον τοῦ Σινᾶ ὄρους ἐστίν. Πολλάκις γὰρ ἐν τούτῳ ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰσῆλθεν ἐπισκεπτόμενός με. Δός μοι οὖν λόγον ὅτι ὧδε κατοικεῖς, κἀγώ σοι τὴν ὑγείαν παρέχω. Ὁ δὲ γέρων ἡδέως καταδεξάμενος συνέθετο μετὰ λόγου παραμένειν τῷ σπηλαίῳ. Παραχρῆμά τε ὑγιάνας διέμεινεν ἐν αὐτῷ μέχρι τῆς αὐτοῦ ζωῆς· ποιήσας τὸ σπήλαιον ἐκεῖνο ἐκκλησίαν· συναγαγὼν δὲ καὶ ἀδελφότητα. Ἔστιν δὲ ὁ τόπος ὁ ἐπιλεγόμενος Σάψας. Τούτου ἐξ εὐωνύμων προπαράκειται ὁ χείμαῤῥος Χωρὰθ, εἰς ὃν ἀπεστάλη Ἠλίας ὁ Θεσβίτης ἐν καιρῷ τῆς ἀβροχίας, ὁ ἐπὶ πρόσωπον τοῦ Ἰορδάνου." trans. by J. Wortley 1992, 4–5.

370 Epiph. Hagiopolita 31. "ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ καταβασιδίου τῆς ἁγί(ας) πόλεως, ἕως τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἰορδάνου, ἐν ᾧ ἐβαπτίσθη ὁ κ(ύριο)ς ἡμ(ῶν), εἰσὶ μίλια, κδ΄[·] ὑπάρχει δὲ ὅλον κατώφορον· ἐν ᾧ ἔστι καὶ πηγὴ τῆς μερᾶς· πέραν δὲ τοῦ ἰορδάνου, ὡς ἀπὸ μιλίων τριῶν, ἔστι σπήλαιον εἰς ὃ ὥκει ὁ πρόδρομος· ἔστι δὲ ἡ κοίτη αὐτοῦ εἰς ἣν ἀνεπαύετο, πεζούλιον αὐτοφυες· ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς πέτρας ἤτοι σπηλαίου· καὶ καμάρα μικρὰ· ἔστι δὲ βρύσις ὕδατος ἔσωθεν τοῦ σπηλαίου· καὶ ἔνδον τῆς καμάρας, ἔστι πηγὴ εἰς ἣν ἐβάπτιζεν ὁ ἅγι(ος) ἰω(άννης) ὁ πρόδρομος·" trans. by, J. Wilkinson 2002, 213–214.

371 Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 200; Piccirillo 2016, 136.

and infirm come there and, holding onto the rope, plunge themselves in the water. Barren women also come there. Our Bishop Willibald bathed himself there in the Jordan.»[372]

The Russian Abbot Daniel (A.D. 1106–1107), visiting the site of Sapsaphas, recalls the site of the Ascension of Elijah to heaven on a chariot of fire and a grotto in which the prophet lived with his disciple Elisha. The Russian monk also mentioned a second cave from which very cool water flowed which was drunk by John the Baptist[373]:

«*And there is a place here to the east some two bowshots distant from the river, where the prophet Elijah was carried up to heaven in a fiery chariot. And here also is the cave of St John the Baptist. And there is a beautiful torrent here full of water, which flows over the rocks into the Jordan; and this water is very cold and very sweet, and this was the water which John the Precursor of Christ drank when he was living in this holy cave. There is another remarkable cave here where the holy prophet Elijah lived with his disciple Elisha. And by the grace of God all this I have seen with my own sinful and unworthy eyes*»[374]

A similar description of the rock caves is given to us by the Greek pilgrim John Phocas, who visited the place of the Baptism in the times of the Crusades (A.D. 1177):

«*Across the Jordan, facing the Baptism, are some thickets, and among these, about a stade away, is the Cave of John Baptist. It is very small, and a tall man cannot stand upright in it. And there is another cave like it in the depths of the desert in which the prophet Elijah was staying when he was snatched away in the chariot of fire*»[375]

The memory of the grotto of St John the Baptist remained in favour until A.D. 1400, as we can read in the itinerary of the Archimandrite Grethenios, even though it was not visited for long out of fear of aggression by Arabs bandits[376].

The archaeological data

The monastic complex of Rotorius on the Tell al-Kharrar

Numerous textual references allow us to better contextualize the monumental evidence connected to the monastic presence which has come to light on the eastern bank of the River Jordan, on the top of the *tell* and in Wadi al-Kharrar. Modern archaeological research was started by Father

372 The Hodoeporicon of St. Willibald, 166. "*Et inde pergentes, venerunt ad Cesaream, ubi fuit aecclesia et multitudo christianorum. Et ibi requiescentes aliquatum tempus, iterum pergebant ad monasterio Sancti Iohannis baptiste; et ibi erant fere 20 monachorum; unam noctem ibi manebant; et inde ibant super unum mil. ad Iordanne, ubi Dominus fuerant baptizatus. Ibi est nunc aecclesia in columnis lapideis sursum elevata, et subtus aecclesia est nunc arida terra, ubi Dominus fuit baptizatus in ipso loco; et ubi nunc baptizant, ibi stat crux lignea in medio, et parva dirivatio aque stat illic, et unus funiculus extensus supra Iordannem, hinc et inde firmatus: tunc in sollempnitate epiphaniae infirmi et egroti venientes et habent se de funiculo et sic demergant in aquam, sed et mulieres que sunt stereles venient ibi. Episcopus noster Willibaldus balneavit se ibi in Iordanne.*" trans. by C. H. Talbot 1995, 154.

373 Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 200; Piccirillo 2016, 136–137.

374 Pilgrimage of the Russian Abbot Daniel, 33, trans. by W. Ryan 1988, 137.

375 John Phocas, Ekphrasis, 25.1. "Πέραν δὲ τοῦ ’Ιορδάνου, ἀντικρὺ τῆς Βαπτίσεως, εἰσὶ θάμνοι διάφοροι, καὶ μέσον τούτων ὡσεὶ σταδίου ἑνὸς ἄποθεν, ἐστὶ τὸ τοῦ Βαπτιστοῦ ’Ιωάννου σπήλαιον, μικρὸν πάνυ καὶ μὴ δυνάμενον δέξασθαι ὄρθιον ἄνδρα εὐμήκη. Καὶ τούτου κατίσον, περὶ τὸ βάθος τῆς ἐρήμου ἕτερόν ἐστι σπήλαιον, ἐν ᾧ ὁ προφήτης ’Ηλίας διαιτώμενος, ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρίνου ἡρπάγη ἅρματος." trans. by J. Wilkinson, 331.

376 Grethenios, Le pèlerinage, 19. "*Le Jourdain est un petit fleuve, mais rapide. Vis-à-vis de l'endroit où le Christ: fut baptisé, fur le rivage oriental, s'élevait une église de la sainte Trinité et il n'en est rien resté, excepté les fondements; et c'est là que le fleuve du Jourdain retourna en arrière. En remontant un peu plus haut, il est plus large et c'est là, où le Christ fut baptisé, que les chrétiens se lavent. Un peu plus bas se trouve un monticule semblable à une meule, du haut duquel le prophète Elie fut enlevé au ciel dans un char tiré par des chevaux de feu; on l'appelle Hermon. On dit qu'au-delà du Jourdain se trouve la grotte de saint Jean le Précurseur; et, à côté, à Enonesalem, il y a beaucoup d'eau, et c'est là que saint Jean baptisait le peuple. Nous n'y allâmes pas de peur des Arabes.*" trans. by B. de Khitrowo 1889, 187. See also Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 200.

Federlin of the congregation of the White Fathers in the church of St Anne in Jerusalem who identified the ruins of Tell Mar Elias[377]. It was not until 1995 that M. Piccirillo, supported by the Hashemite Prince Ghazi, brought attention back to the site of the Baptism and the start of archaeological investigations promoted by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan[378].

Tell al-Kharrar stands about two kilometres from the River Jordan, between the *wadi* Nimrin and Gharaba on what is the south-eastern bank of the Wadi al-Kharrar[379]. The northern part of the hill was occupied by a vast monastic complex surrounded by walls (Fig. 127). The monastery stood on three distinct levels united by a ramp corresponding to the main entry. The two churches were situated on the lower level, on the middle level were located the tanks for collecting water, while the upper level included the rooms where the monks lived[380].

The name of the monastery is connected with the hegumen Rotorius, whose actions are recalled in a mosaic epigraph in Greek found in the apse of the northern church[381]. The archaeological finds suggest a continuity of life from the 5th to the second half of the 7th cent. A.D.[382].

In the southern area a large hall called Prayer Room and a structured system of water channels built from the 5th cent. A.D. have been identified[383]. The Prayer Room was made up of a rectangular-shaped building in local stone, the sides of which measure 11.75 m in the east-west direction and 7.30 m in the north-south direction. The room was paved with a white mosaic on top of which wooden remains of the beams of the roof were recovered during excavations[384]. Most of the finds discovered *in situ* allow the construction to be dated to before the 5th cent. A.D.[385]. Two smaller rooms developed close to the north-east corner of the room, perhaps used as additional rooms.

Not far away from the Prayer Room in the south-western corner of the *tell*, it is possible to glimpse the remains of what is known as the Church of the Arch. Of the structure, which measures 13.5 m in an east-west direction and 9 in a north-south one, only some rows of stones belonging to the perimeter walls and a small portion of the white mosaic pavement decorated with a cross motif remain[386]. The roof was supported by a system of three arches, one of which has been raised after complete restoration and has given its name to the church[387]. Towards the western corner of the building there was a courtyard, perhaps for the assembly of the faithful. The finds discovered in the excavations allow a probable dating sometime between the 4th and the 6th cent. A.D.[388].

In this area of the *tell* there are many components of the water system that channelled the flow of water and redistributed it to the individual facilities on the hill. In particular, the different springs of Ain al-Kharrar, Ain Salim, Ain al-Fawara and Ain al-Hamman were connected by a closely-knit network of pottery channels that joined the Wadi al-Kharrar with the Wadi Kefrein and ar-Ramah[389]. The area of collection of the spring water was located near the Prayer Hall where a reservoir and two small tanks were built: the water flowed into a pool and into a

377 Federlin 1902, 154–156; Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 201.
378 For the narration of the first surveys, see Piccirillo 2016, 138–143.
379 Waheeb 2016, 41.
380 Waheeb 2016, 57.
381 See below 148 and Waheeb 1998, 636.
382 Waheeb 2016, 57.
383 Mkhjian 2005, 403–410, Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 206.
384 Waheeb 2016, 45.
385 Mkhjian 2005, 407.
386 Waheeb 2016, 46–47.
387 Mkhjian 2005, 407; Waheeb 2016, 46–47.
388 Waheeb 2016, 47.
389 Waheeb 2016, 48.

Fig. 127 Bethany beyond the Jordan. The monastic complex of Rotorius on the Tell al-Kharrar (© APAAME).

cistern from where, flowing into an aqueduct supported by pilasters in a north-eastern direction, it reached three other pools on the top of the *tell*[390].

The pool (3 × 6.5 m), excavated directly into the rock of the hill and faced with stone slabs of limestone and plaster, had a vaulted roof with a mosaic pavement[391]. The fragments of pottery suggest a date between the 5th and the 6th cent. A.D.[392]. Not far away there was a cylindrical cistern with a diameter of 3.25 m and a depth of 5.4 m with a total capacity of 45 m^3 of water[393].

The southern rectangular pool (4 × 7.50 m)[394] had steps along the eastern edge of which today only four steps remain, which allowed descent for ritual purposes[395]. Another two pools connected with one another were at the top of the *tell*. In the north-eastern one (3.40 × 4.30 m) some stone slabs used to go down into the reservoir have been identified, while under the north-western pool (2.5 × 4.85 m), the archaeologists have found a circular well (2.10 m in diameter and 12 m high)[396]. The archaeological materials suggest a dating from the 5th–6th cent. A.D. and a possible joint use with the liturgical services of the ecclesiastical buildings.

The most significant monumental evidence is related to the two churches built in the northern part of Elijah's hill. The northern church, with two accesses on the northern and western sides, is well preserved and is made up of the presbytery (4.15 × 4.20 m) and the nave (8.85 × 4.1 m)[397]. The building contained a polychrome mosaic with a geometric cross motif in red tesserae on a white ground. As mentioned earlier, the inscription found in the part of the apse commemorates the name of the hegumen who promoted the edification of the monastic complex[398]. The roof was made of wood and supported by a system of pilasters.

The western church was the one probably connected with the memory of the prophet Elijah. The apse of the presbytery (2.30 × 1.85 m) was obtained from a natural grotto dug in the slope of the hill and placed under the north-western pool[399]. Three naves developed from this, divided by two colonnades (9.65 m long by 14.55 wide)[400]. Small pieces of mosaic found during the excavations give a partial idea of the pavement of the building. Between the two churches there was another small room measuring 6 × 6 m with a mosaic, which was perhaps used for other requirements of worship.

Unfortunately, only a few isolated walls built of local stone remain from the original rooms inhabited by the monks. The top of the *tell* was closed off by a subsequent settlement between the 12th and 17th cent. A.D. which was used by a subsequent Greek Orthodox monastic community[401].

390 Waheeb 2016, 48. The aqueduct was built at a later phase because the pilasters that supported the water structure occupied part of the two additional areas of the Prayer Hall.
391 Waheeb 2016, 49.
392 Mkhjian 2005, 406–407; Waheeb 2016, 49–50.
393 Mkhjian 2005, 407.
394 These are the most recent data provided by the archaeologist M. Waheeb, however, it has to be reported that R. Mkhjian gives a different dimension for the southern tank: 5.30 × 3.70 m. See Mkhjian 2005, 407 and Waheeb 2016, 50.
395 Waheeb 2016, 50.
396 Waheeb 2016, 50.
397 Waheeb 2016, 50; a slight difference is noted in the architectonic survey in Mkhjian 2005, 407.
398 The inscription reads: "With the help of God, the whole monastery was built in the time of Rotorius, priest and abbot greatly loved by God. May God our saviour grant him mercy." For the details see Waheeb 1998, 636.
399 Waheeb 2016, 50.
400 Mkhjian 2005, 407.
401 Waheeb 2016, 50.

The hermitage settlements in the Wadi al-Kharrar

The area of the Wadi al-Kharrar which stands about 300 metres from the River Jordan is characterized by a large presence of caves dug out of the whitish marl of the low reliefs of Lisan[402]. The natural cavities were transformed into cells or small chapels inhabited by monks and hermits from the time of the pilgrim Egeria[403]. The excavations of 1999 by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan brought to light a small rock *laura* made up of three grottoes in the western side of the Tell al-Kharrar near two other natural cavities near the River Jordan[404] (Fig. 128). These last two hermitages were placed about ten metres from the ground in a very panoramic point of the rocks situated exactly in correspondence with the ford of the river[405]. The elevated position, as well as being in agreement with the typical anchoretic practice of the Christian monks, also respected more practical needs such as protection from wild animals and possible floods.

The rock hermitages in the Wadi al-Kharrar were distinguished by a plan with an internal partition, usually diving them into two rooms. The rooms, which opened with a narrow corridor, were made up of a main room, probably where the monk lived, and a second, more internal one, for prayer[406] (Fig. 129). A series of small niches and alcoves enhanced the ascetic architecture[407].

The *laura* on the western side of the *tell* had three grottos dug out at the same level which were structured along a north-south axis. The three cavities could be reached by steps in local stone, of which only two steps are preserved[408]. Of the first grotto, situated in correspondence with the south-western corner of the hill, only the arched entrance and the eastern apse wall are visible; unfortunately, the remainder has been lost due to the process of natural erosion[409]. The same situation also distinguishes the second grotto of which only the apse wall, 2.50 m long, remains[410].

The third grotto (2.25 m deep and 2 m high) is, on the other hand, situated near the entrance to the monastery of Rotorius, about six metres north of the second grotto. In the Byzantine period, the monks caused a monumentalization of the rock cavity which became the apse of a church built in front of its entrance[411]. A small mosaic fragment and remains of pilasters inform us of the architecture of the nave (13 × 13 m)[412]. An artificial channel about 6 m long which flowed under the floor of the church from the entrance of the grotto continued until Wadi al-Kharrar. The exact point of origin of the water is not clear, whether from a spring, from decantation pools or from the *wadi* itself[413]. The ritual aspect of the areas, as well as the presence of the water, is also underlined by the discovery of the skull of a man of about twenty, buried in a ditch not far from the entrance to the grotto[414].

The pottery sherds recovered in the excavations of the grottos on the *tell* allow the hypothesis of an occupation as early as Roman times (1st cent. A.D.), followed by a sporadic presence in the 2nd and 3rd centuries and by the subsequent reorganization of the rock cavities by the monks in the Byzantine period (from the 4th cent. A.D.)[415].

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402 Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 210; Waheeb 2016, 50.
403 See above 149.
404 Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 210; Waheeb 2016, 62–74.
405 Waheeb 2016, 63.
406 For a detailed description of the hermitages, see the excavation data in Waheeb 2016, 64–65.
407 Waheeb 2016, 64–65.
408 Waheeb 2016, 64–65.
409 Waheeb 2016, 66.
410 Waheeb 2016, 66.
411 Waheeb 2016, 67.
412 Waheeb 2016, 67.
413 For the numerous hypotheses, see Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 210 and Waheeb 2016, 68.
414 M. Waheeb dwells on an anatomical detail of the skull. The four lines of stitches in the occipital area allegedly form a cross that could have made the monastic community make an intentional burial with ritual purposes. See Waheeb 2016, 68.
415 Waheeb 2016, 69.

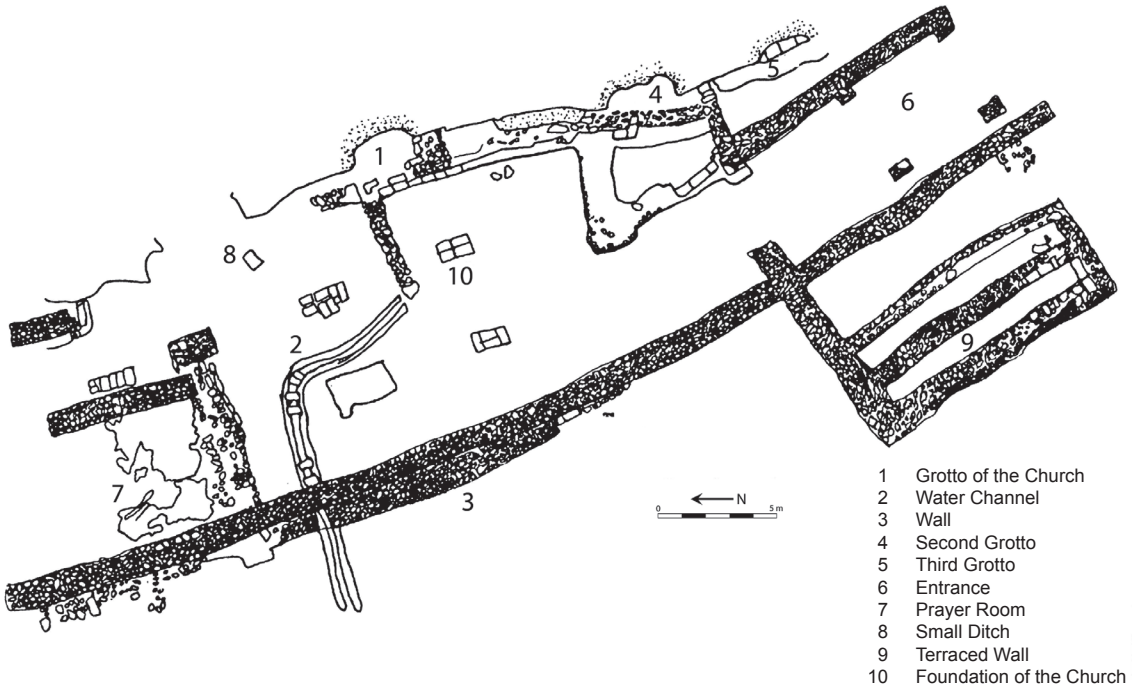

Fig. 128 Bethany beyond the Jordan. Hermits' settlements in the Wadi al-Kharrar. Plan of the western side of Elijah's hill (after Waheeb *et al*. 2011, 195, fig. 6).

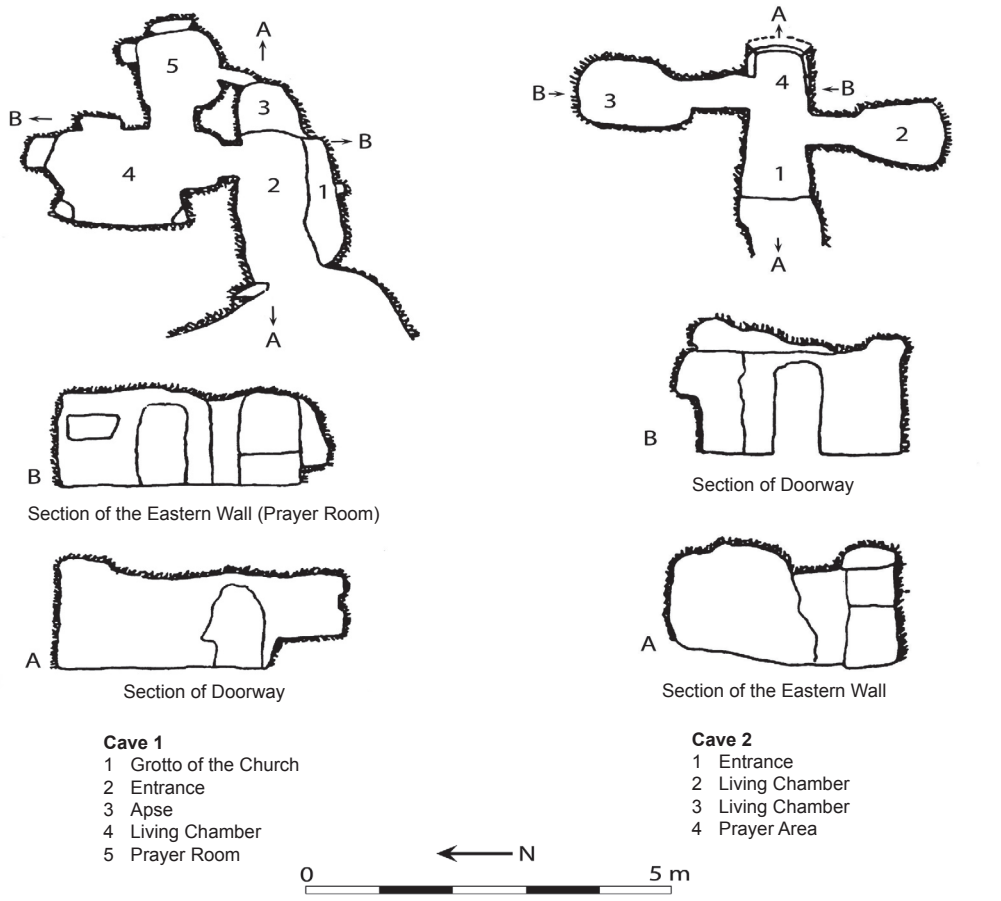

Fig. 129 Bethany beyond the Jordan. Hermits' settlements in the Wadi al-Kharrar. Plan and cross-section of the caves nos. 1–2 (after Waheeb *et al*. 2011, 192–193, figs. 1–2).

The absence of epigraphic texts does not allow the identification of whether a specific grotto connected with the shelter of the prophet Elijah or with John the Baptist existed. The natural elements, including the caves, the spring water and the hill, certainly formed the perfect topography for the practices of devotion to the prophet Elijah on which the memory of the Precursor of Christ was superimposed.

A set of other buildings of worship stood near the river, corresponding with the site of the Baptism of Jesus[416]. While partially falling outside the subject of this discussion, on the memorials of Old and New Testament figures, attention has to be paid to these structures to complete knowledge of the local architectonic panorama.

The most important monumental evidence relates to three churches. Of the first, the foundations of the walls, a double row of pilasters and some mosaic fragments of the pavement of the ecclesiastical structure remain[417]. The most significant particularity of the church was the platform, the massive pillars of which in local sandstone (from 1 to 1.5 m high) were planted in the swampy soil of the river bank[418]. The pottery fragments which can be dated between the 5th and 6th centuries A.D. and some coins attributable to Anastasius I (491–518) together allow the supposition that the remains belong to the basilica built by this Byzantine emperor[419]. A second building stood next to the previous one directly on the alluvial soil of the river. It was probably built shortly after the construction of the first church, but to date only some perimeter walls and the white marble pavement are visible[420].

The last church was built reusing pilasters and masonry from the first building, probably destroyed due to frequent flooding by the river[421]. Distinguished by a basilica plan of three naves (20 × 20 m) it had a fine pavement in *opus sectile* with a floral pattern made with polychrome marble of which a part, still *in situ*, is preserved in the area of the presbytery; other marble fragments are in the southern and northern nave[422]. East of the altar, the archaeologists have identified the remains of steps[423] which from the entrance door of the church led down towards the river[424]. At the bottom of the steps there was a small rectangular structure placed on a platform overhanging the river. Worthy of note are some devotional signs scratched by pilgrims on the northern wall of the sandstone steps[425]. The remains of a small building of worship of 6 × 4 m were identified east of the church of St John the Baptist[426].

In correspondence with the river, a structure of 20.5 × 24.5 m was also identified of which only some parts of an elevated wall divided into three architectonic units remain[427]. The simplicity of the materials used for the construction and the floor of beaten earth allow the hypothesis that the building may have had a practical function, perhaps a shelter for the animals of the faithful and of visitors[428]. This element agrees with the numerous accounts of the pilgrims who report the practices of hospitality by the monks.

416 Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 202.
417 For an analytical description of the pavement, see Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 203 and Waheeb 2016, 78–81.
418 Waheeb 2016, 80.
419 Waheeb 2016, 80–81.
420 Waheeb 2016, 82.
421 Waheeb 2016, 82.
422 Waheeb 2016, 82.
423 The stairs, 2.50 m wide, were formed of twenty-two steps, each of which had a height that varied from 17 to 23 cm.
424 Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 203.
425 Hamarneh – Roncalli 2009, 206. For more details see Waheeb 2016, 84–92.
426 Waheeb 2016, 92–95.
427 Waheeb 2016, 96–99.
428 Waheeb 2016, 98–99.

3.3.3 The patriarch Lot: the monastic complex of Deir ‘Ain ‘Abata

The shrine of Lot is an important monastery in the province of *Palaestina Tertia*. A settlement of monks developed in connection with the cave which, according to Biblical tradition, saw the nephew of Abraham, Lot, lie with his two daughters and thus give rise to the forefathers of the peoples of the Moabites and of the Ammonites respectively.

Biblical memories and literary sources

The life of the patriarch is described in certain verses of Genesis[429], but here the episode that occurred after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen, 19, 30–38 is significant. The Biblical text informs us that Lot, having fled from the city of Zoara, decided to seek refuge in a grotto with his two daughters[430]. As the two young women had remained in isolation for a long time and were worried about having descendants, they got their father drunk to be able to lie with him.

The Christian veneration of the patriarch Lot, celebrated on 10th October[431], accentuates the positive qualities of the patriarch stated in the Book of Wisdom[432] and in the Second Letter of Peter[433]. His wish to obey the commands of God, his sense of justice, his hospitality for the angels and his purity of habits, not at all touched by the incestuous behaviour as forced by deceit and therefore deemed without fault, are positively emphasized. The cult of St Lot spread in Palestine and in Jordan where, as well as the monastic complex of Deir ‘Ain ‘Abata, a church dedicated to the prophet in the village of Khirbet el-Mukhayyat, in the Mount Nebo region, was identified[434].

The onomastic reference to the monastery of Lot appears near the present-day site of Ghor es-Safi, the Biblical city of Zoar, on the mosaic map of Madaba[435]. The document shows the iconography of a small building situated on the eastern reliefs near the Dead Sea. The unequivocal element for the identification of the place is the Greek inscription Τὸ τοῦ ἁγίου Λ[ώτ] (sanctuary –or place– of St Lot) which informs exactly of the existence of a complex dedicated to the patriarch[436].

In the *Life of St Stephen the Sabaite*, by Leontius of Damascus, we learn that during their Lenten peregrinations, the monks who wandered in the desert near the Dead Sea usually stopped near Lot’s grotto:

> «*He lived with them at a distance of fifteen, twenty or forty miles from the laura, near Calamone, in the caves of Arnūn, or Giarībā, or Cutila, or ar-Rūba, or Castellion, or mār Lūt, or mār Harūn or behind the Dead Sea, and there they would spend the whole of Lent, as the fathers did not tolerate being separated from him and remaining alone*»[437]

The practice of venerating the patriarch Lot also continued during the medieval period as can be learned from the words of the Russian Abbot Daniel, visiting the city of Sigor, i.e. Zoar:

> «*From there to Sigor it is two versts. Here there are two tombs, the tomb of Lot and the tombs of his two daughters. And on the same mountain there is a great cave and it*

429 Gen. 11, 31; Gen. 12–13. 18–19.
430 Gen. 19, 30.
431 Saller – Bagatti 1949, 197.
432 Wisdom. 10, 6; 19, 16.
433 2 Pt 2.7. For further information on the sanctification of Lot and the numerous attestations in the oldest Christian martyrologies, see the study in Saller – Bagatti 1949, 194–199.
434 Piccirillo 1989a, 182–188.
435 Alliata 1999a, 58. 61; MacDonald 2010, 200–202.
436 MacDonald – Politis 1988; Politis 1999, 225–227; Alliata 1999a, 58; Politis 2012, 19–21.
437 V. Steph. Sab., 16, 2. Italian trans. by B. Pirone 1991, 96–97; English by the author.

was to this cave that Lot fled with his two daughters. Nearby are the remains of a city of the first inhabitants [of the place], high on the mountain, and this is called Sigor»[438]

Lastly, some testimonies of the Muslim period are interesting. The presence of an inscription in Kufic Arabic, with the usual initial invocation of Allah, would suggest an interest by pilgrims of the Muslim faith in the figure of Lot, moreover also mentioned in Surah 37, v. 134 of the Quran. In addition, in the 10th cent., the Arab geographer Yaqut ibn-'Abdullah al-Rumi al-Hamawi (A.D. 1179–1229) in his *Kitab mu'jam al-buldan* recalls the Biblical episode of Lot, indicating the name of his two daughters as Rubbah and Saghur and identifying the two springs near their burial place[439].

The archaeological data

The archaeological excavations at the monastic site of Deir 'Ain 'Abata were carried out from 1986 to 1995, then followed by a period of post-excavation study. The investigations, directed by a multidisciplinary team under K. Politis were financed by the British Museum of London, the Department of Antiquities of Jordan and the Greek government[440].

The monastic complex extends in the valley of the Jordan to −253 m.a.s.l. and about three kilometres from the Dead Sea[441]. The structures, which developed at the foot of the rocky slope that rises towards the plateau, included a large water tank, a *diakonikon*, a church with a three-nave plan with an adjacent cave, the living spaces for the monks and a hospice for the pilgrims[442] (Fig. 130).

The large tank is at the southern end of the complex and near the bed of a *wadi*[443]. The basin, about 6 m deep and with a capacity of almost 800,000 litres, had a roof supported by seven arches and internally showed a waterproof facing of crushed earthenware[444]. The almost disproportional dimensions of the tank reflect the difficulties of finding water in a particularly infertile area such as that of the Dead Sea. In addition, around the basin there was a close-knit system of pipes and channels to convey the water from the nearby *wadi* as well as from the roof of the church and the cistern itself[445] (Fig. 132).

The *diakonikon* of the church extended beyond the basin, unfortunately found severely damaged. Some mosaic fragments inform us about the pavement of this area[446]. The mosaic with a white ground was set in a frame with three braided polychrome lines according to the *guilloche* model. The central part of the mosaic is occupied by a large *kantharos* with two handles from which sinuous vines appear and it is characterized by two inscriptions in Greek. Above the urn, there is a large pomegranate tree with on its right a hermaphrodite lion with a mane and four nipples and on the left a dog[447]. The first inscription consists of ten lines in the body of the vase and provides the date of repaving the room, between 22 March A.D. 572 and 21 March A.D. 573 in the time of the Bishop Peter of Zoara, while the second, enclosed in a decorative band on the shoulder, provides us with the name of the mosaic artist Kosmas[448].

438 Pilgrimage of the Russian Abbot Daniel, 56. Trans. by W. Ryan 1988, 148.
439 Politis 2012, 21.
440 For the history of the studies, see Politis 2012, 2–8.
441 Politis 2012, 9–16.
442 MacDonald 2010, 194–195.
443 MacDonald 2010, 195; Politis 2012, 115–123.
444 Politis 2012, 115.
445 Politis 2012, 115.
446 Politis 2012, 177 no. 7.
447 Politis 2012, 177 no. 7.
448 The inscription reads: "+ In the time of the most holy bishop Petros and of the hegumen Euzoios and of the *epitropos* (administrator) Ioannes and of the *oikonomos* (steward) Georgios (this mosaic pavement) was renovated in 467 (467 Era of Province Arabia = 22 March A.D. 572 – 21 March A.D. 573), [through the zeal] of the monks Ioannes, Theodoros (and) Ioannes". The second inscription informs us of the name of the mosaicist: "+ Kosma (is

Fig. 130 Deir ʻAin ʻAbata. Aerial photo of the monastic complex (© APAAME).

Fig. 131 Deir ʻAin ʻAbata. Aerial photo of the monastic church (© APAAME).

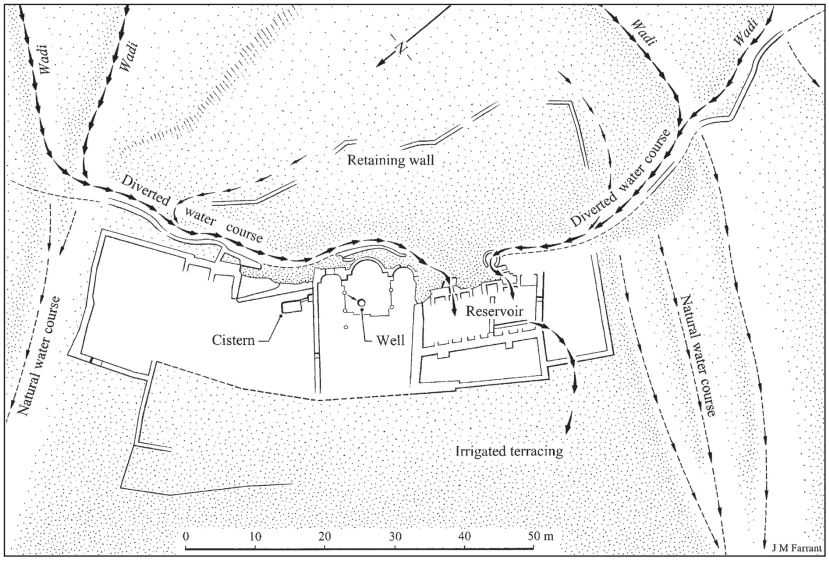

Fig. 132 Deir ʿAin ʿAbata. Plan of the water system of the monastic complex (after Politis 2012, 121).

A terraced area at the side of the tank and of the *diakonikon* was used both as a garden probably for growing vines and as a point of access to the *diakonikon* itself and to the other areas of the monastery. In addition, it is also possible to imagine that this is where the pilgrims visiting the monastery were welcomed[449].

The narthex developed beyond the *diakonikon* and from there, through three doors, it was possible to enter the hall of the basilica divided into three naves (Fig. 131). The church was paved with four mosaics, three of which have inscriptions in Greek. The mosaic in the north nave, qualitatively the best, presents a decoration with a geometric motif with a grid containing squares, diamonds and flowers on an even white ground[450]. Facing the entrance to the cave there is a mosaic inscription between a *tabula ansata* which reveals that the mosaic was produced between A.D. 605/607 in the time of the Emperor Phocas (A.D. 602–610) and the episcopate of Isaakios of Jerusalem[451]. The entrance to the cave has two levels covered in mosaics, the lower one dated to the 5th–6th cent. A.D. with red and black tesserae, while the one above, dated to ca. A.D. 605, had multi-coloured tesserae arranged in a casual fashion[452] (Fig. 133). In the presbytery there was another mosaic dated to ca. A.D. 605, decorated with sinuous vines, inside of which there were birds, peacocks and a ram; at the centre, corresponding to the altar, there was a cup and below that a cross with the inscription Τέλος καλόν[453].

The most significant data for understanding the monastic complex come from the second mosaic of the central nave, placed directly above the previous pavement of A.D. 605[454]. The

the) mosaicist". For the edition of the Greek text and the detailed critical apparatus, see Meimaris – Kritikakou-Nikolaropolou 2012, 393–400 no. 1.

449 The hypothesis is reinforced by the presence of a lower slope on this side of the complex that would have made access easier for the faithful. On this aspect, see Politis 2012, 122.

450 Politis 2012, 175 no. 3.

451 The inscription reads: "In the time of our most holy father Iakovos, the bishop, and of Sozomenos, (the) hegumen, the laying of the mosaic was made in (the) month of April in (the) 10th indiction, (in the) year 500 (500 Era of Province Arabia = April A.D. 605, or 502 Era of Province Arabia = April A.D. 607)." For the attribution of the dating according to the chronological system used in the province of *Palaestina Tertia*, see Meimaris – Kritikakou-Nikolaropolou 2012, 401–403 no. 4.

452 Politis 2012, 175 nos. 1–2.

453 The translation is: (May the) end (to life be) good. On this issue, see Politis 2012, 176 no. 4; Meimaris – Kritikakou-Nikolaropolou 2012, 400–401 no 3.

454 For the data on this mosaic, see Politis 2012, 176 no 5. 556, table 23.

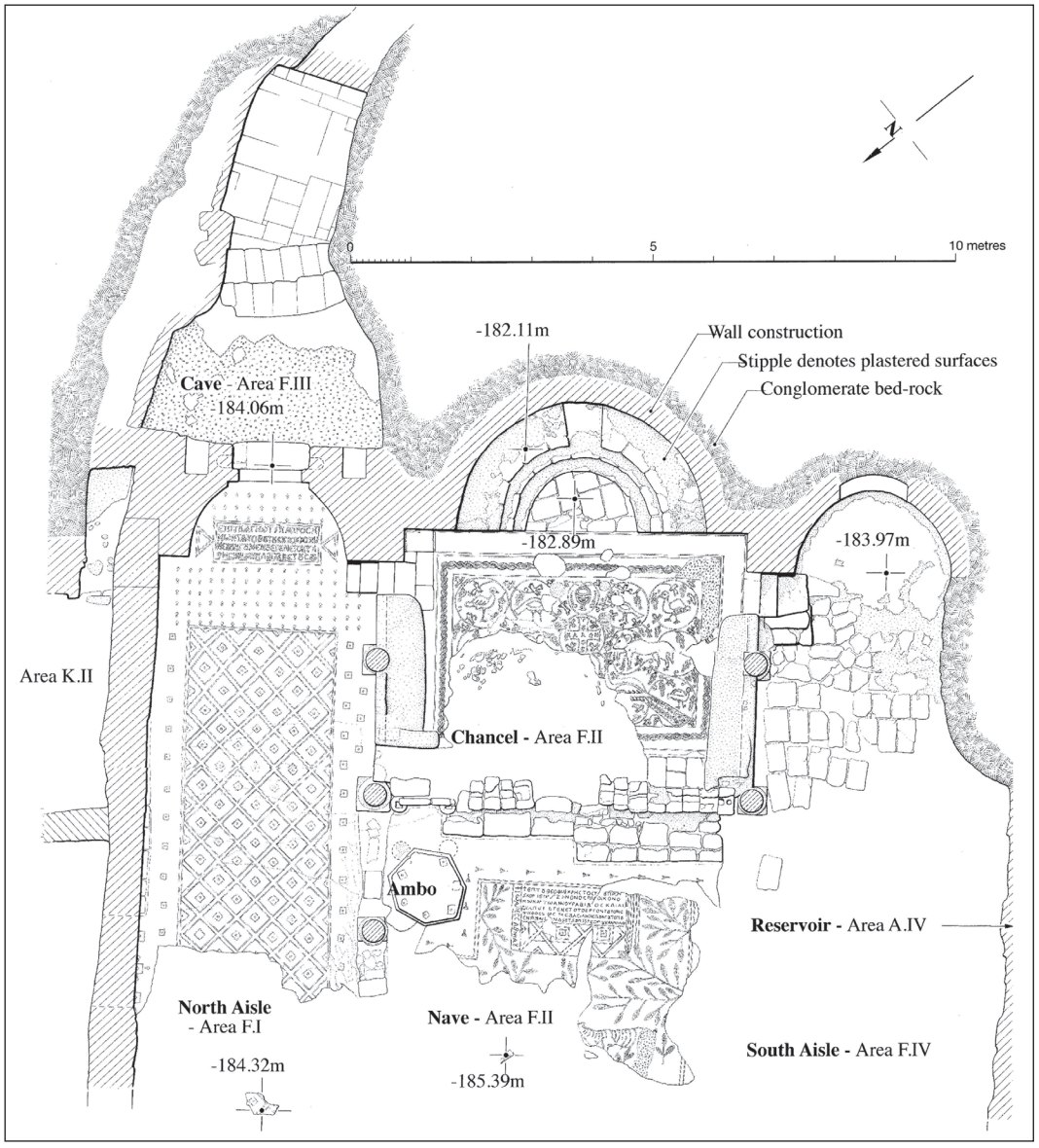

Fig. 133 Deir ʻAin ʻAbata. Plan of the monastic church (after Politis 2012, 127).

mosaic shows an inscription in Greek on the ecclesiastical hierarchy active in the region of Zoara, on the Semitic social component, as can be seen from the name of the supposed mosaicist, Ioapes son of Sabneaos, and above all on the date it was made, A.D. 691 in the middle of the Muslim period[455]. A series of branches with freely drawn leaves, which according to K. Politis could have come from the previous Nabatean influx, and the body of an animal complete the pattern of the mosaic[456].

455 The inscription (a) is set within a rectangular frame. At its left side there is inscription (b), which run vertically. "In the time of the most God-loving Cristophoros, (the) presbyter and *chorepiskopos* (country bishop), and of Zenon, (the) presbyter and *oikonomos* (steward), and of Ioannes son of Rabibos, [(the) presbyter?] and *dioiketes* (administrator), this work of mosaic pavement of the basilica of the holy place was made in the month of *Xanthikos*, in (the) 5th indiction, in the (year) 586 (586 Era Province of Arabia = 22 March–20 April A.D. 692); and (in the time) of Georgios (the) *candelaptes* (candle lighter)". For (b) "Ioapes son of Sabneaos" the Greek edition of the text and the relative critical apparatus, see Meimaris – Kritikakou-Nikolaropolou 2012, 403–409 no 5.

456 Politis 2012, 176–177 no 6.

The most characteristic element of the complex is, however, the cave which is at the end of the north nave. The natural cavity connected with the Biblical memory of Lot and his daughters is linked to the church by an entrance with pilasters in sandstone, the capitals of which show engraved crosses and signs of red paint and an architrave, which also has a cross, with two lateral rosettes at its sides[457]. The internal room measures approximately 2 × 2.5 m and, as already observed, has two levels of mosaic pavements[458]. It is interesting to note the long occupation of the cave in the Ancient Bronze Age I (ca. 3300–3000 B.C.), as shown by fragments of small amphorae and cups associated with skeletal remains of collective burials[459], in the Middle Bronze Age II (1900–1550 B.C.)[460], in the late Hellenistic and Nabatean periods (in particular some ritual vessels dated between the 1st cent. B.C. and the 1st cent. A.D.)[461], in the first Byzantine period (4th–5th cent. A.D.) and in the Abbasid period (8th cent. A.D.). Evidence of Christian veneration of the site by pilgrims can also be observed in two inscriptions scratched into the plaster on the southern wall of the cave[462].

The site of Deir ʻAin ʻAbata stands out for the importance of the monastic facilities which allow detailed insights into aspects of the social life of the monastery. The most important nucleus is situated north of the basilica and has Lot's cave as the focal point, an atrium, an open courtyard, the refectory and the single rooms for the monks and a hostel for pilgrims[463]. As for the basilica, the monastery also presents two phases of building, before and after 691 A.D. In the first phase, the church allowed accessibility to and from the northern sectors, whilst in the second phase this function seems to have been limited[464].

The discovery of a collective burial place inside an abandoned reservoir (containing twenty-eight men, one woman and three children) and of some cist tombs with the bones of two children, a baby and a foetus deserves particular attention[465]. The anthropological investigations on the skeletons have confirmed the presence of numerous pathologies which would suggest that the people died during a period of treatment at the monastic hospice[466].

The productive aspect of the monastery is found, on the other hand, on the western side of the mountain, where a complex system of agricultural terracing was used to produce the food necessary for the dietary requirements of the religious and of the pilgrims[467].

3.3.4 The high priest and Saint Aaron: the monastery of Jabal Haroun near Petra

Biblical memories and literary sources

Without going into the numerous Biblical references which link the figure of Aaron to Moses, it is important here to examine the accounts by pilgrims which inform us of the death of the first high priest of the Jewish People and on the building of the relative Christian shrine.

457 Politis 2012, 129–134.
458 See above 155.
459 Politis 2012, 25–44.
460 Eighteen tombs found to the north of the monastic complex are dated to the same period. See Politis 2012, 45–105.
461 Politis 2012, 107–114.
462 The first graffiti inscription is in Greek and recalls a certain Zenobia, daughter of Anastasios, the second is in Kufic Arabic and contains the typical Muslim invocation to Allah. See in detail Politis 2012, 414–415 no. 18, table 22. 417 no. 1.
463 For the stratigraphic sequence of the individual areas with the relative bibliographic references, see Politis 2012, 142–157; for the analysis of the spatial dynamics of the monastery, see Chatford-Clark 2012, 169.
464 Chatford-Clark 2012, 169.
465 For the detailed study of the skeleton remains, see Gruspier 2012, 421–448.
466 Gruspier 2012, 421–448.
467 MacDonald 2010, 199–200.

The exact location of the place of the death of Aaron gave rise to numerous problems of identification because the Biblical text contains indications which are vague and in disagreement with one another. Specifically, Numbers 20, 22–29 and Deuteronomy 32, 48–51[468] report that Aaron died on the peak of Mount Hor, after both brothers and Eleazar had left the camp of Kadesh, but without stating where the body was buried[469]. Deuteronomy 10, 6, on the other hand, says that Aaron died and was buried at Moserah.

There are numerous speculations on the identification of Mount Hor to be found in the literary sources. In particular, in his *Jewish Antiquities,* Flavius Josephus recalls that the two brothers climbed up a mountain near a city formally called Ἄρκη by the Arabs, but known as Petra[470]. The reference of the death of Aaron on Mount Hor, near Petra, is also found in the *Onomasticon* by Eusebius[471]. Although these literary references are reconciled with what has been discovered during the archaeological investigations, modern historiographic criticism still suggests extreme prudence in identifying Mount Hor[472].

Unlike the shrines examined previously, the monastery of St Aaron is not mentioned in any travelogue of the Byzantine period, even though the site is not very far from the *Via Nova Traiana*, the road taken by numerous faithful who from Palestine usually went to the monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai[473].

Testimonies on the presence of monasteries in Petra are, on the other hand, attested in the documents of the councils of Jerusalem and Constantinople held in the middle of the 6th cent. A.D., but without specific indications of the monastery of Jabal Haroun[474]. More precise information can be gained from the Greek papyrus inv. 6a, recovered in 1993 during the excavation of the Byzantine church of Petra, which mentions a donation by a certain Obodianus, son of Obodianus on 15th June A.D. 573. The recipients are the "Holy House of our lord the Saint High Priest Aaron" (ἅγιος οἶκος τοῦ δεσπότου ἡμῶν τοῦ ἁγίου ἀρχιερέως Ἀαρών) probably situated in the vicinity[475] and the *xenodochium* of the saint and triumphant martyr Cyriac, perhaps to confirm the strong bond between the monastic institution and the function of hospice for pilgrims which was common after the imperial decree of Justinian I[476].

Despite the progressive abandonment and the natural catastrophic events which struck the city of Petra, the flows of pilgrims attracted by the holiness of the place connected with Aaron did not lessen in the medieval period. In addition to the visits of many monks during their Lenten peregrinations in the desert, some literary accounts in Arabic and in Latin in the time of the Crusades inform us of the longevity of the monastery on Jabal Haroun. In particular, the Arab historian Abu al-Hasan ʻAli al-Masʻudi (A.D. 897–957) recalls in his *Muruj al-dhahab* that some faithful believed that Aaron died on Mount Moab and was buried there, whilst for others he was laid to rest inside a natural cave[477]. Furthermore, in his last work, *al-Tanbih wa l-ashraf,* the historian writes how Jabal Haroun remained a sacred mountain for the Christians of the Chalcedonian faith[478].

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468 B. MacDonald identifies the Biblical oasis of Kades both with ʻAin Qadeis and with ʻAyn al-Qudeirat. See MacDonald 2000, 69 and MacDonald 2010, 210.

469 The passage in Deut. 32, 48–51 shows an interesting parallel with the death of Moses, to which we will return later.

470 Flav. Ant. Iud. 2, 82–83.

471 Eus. onomast. 176.

472 See in particular Frösén – Miettunen 2008, 10–11.

473 Frösén – Miettunen 2008, 11.

474 See in particular the documents relative to the synod of A.D. 536, with the signatures of the hegumens and monks from the monasteries of the region of Petra. Frösén – Miettunen 2008, 12.

475 Gagos – Frösén 1998, 476–477 inv. 6a. 480 inv. 86; Frösén – Miettunen 2008, 12.

476 The practice was reinforced in particular after the great plague which started in Egypt in A.D. 542. See in this regard Miller 1985, 99–100; Frösén 2004, 143–144; Fiema 2006, 68–71; Frösén – Miettunen 2008, 12.

477 Frösén – Miettunen 2008, 12 and note 116.

478 Frösén – Miettunen 2008, note 117.

During the Crusades, Fulcher of Chartres (A.D. 1059–1127) in his *Historia Hierosolymitana* describing the expedition of Baldwin in A.D. 1100 to Wadi Musa, also mentioned the monastery of Aaron:

> «*Furthermore we found at the top of the mountain the Monastery of St Aaron where Moses and Aaron were wont to speak with God. We rejoiced very much to behold a place so holy and to us unknown.*»[479]

As J. Frösén points out, although Fulcher does not give any specific information on the monastic complex, it is easy to suppose that the monastery was still active and inhabited[480].

The Benedictine abbot Guibert of Nogent (A.D. 1055–1124), in his *Gesta Francorum,* mentions a church on the top of Mount Hor, but which he confused with Mount Sinai and without any mention of a monastery[481].

The account by Magister Thietmar is more problematic. During his pilgrimage to Mount Sinai in A.D. 1217, he stopped near Mount Hor:

> «*At length I came to Mount Hor (Or), where Aaron died. On its summit a church has been built in which two Greek Christian monks are living. That place is called Moserah (Muscera) Mount Hor is very high and its ascent is difficult. It overlooks all the mountains of that province.*» [482]

Although the text mentions the presence of a church and monks, J. Frösén suggests that there is no specific reference to the ruins of the monastery of Jabal Haroun or even that Thietmar did not personally climb the mountain[483]. However, the information regarding the two Greek monks, which may have reached the Crusader pilgrim through local guides or other written sources, nevertheless reflects a monastic presence that was still active in the area around Petra[484].

Muslim veneration for Aaron in this place replaced the Christian one when, in the 12th cent. the Mameluke Sultans Baybars al-'Ala'i al-Bunduqdari (A.D. 1223–1277) and Sayf al-Din Qalawun al-Alfi al-Mansur (A.D. 1222 ca–1290) gave orders to build a shrine to commemorate the brother of Moses on the top of Jabal Haroun[485].

The archaeological data

The modern archaeological investigations started with the survey in 1991 by G. Peterman and R. Schick which allowed a general plan of the site to be made, and above all finding a correspondence between the literary and the historical sources[486]. On the basis of these data, a mission from the University of Helsinki gave rise to the Finnish *Jabal Hārūn Project* (FJHP)

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479 Fulcheri Carnotensis, Hist. Hier. 2.5.9, 381. "*Invenimus insuper in montis apice Monasterium Sancti Aaron, ubi Moyses et ipse cum Deo loqui soliti erant. Unde multum laetabamur, cum loca tam sancta et nobis incognita intuebamur. Et quoniam ultra vallem illam terra erat deserta et inculta, ulterius progredi noluimus.*" trans. by Frösén – Miettunen 2008, 14 note 122.

480 Frösén – Miettunen 2008, 13.

481 Musil 1907, 161; Frösén – Miettunen 2008, 14.

482 Mag. Thiet. Iter ad Terram Sanctam 16. "*Tandem veni ad montem Or, ubi Aaron mortuus fuit. In cuius summitate est ecclesia constructa, in qua habitant duo monachi Greci christiani. Qui locus dicitur Muscera. Mons Or altus est valde, et difficilis ascensus eius, et supereminet omnes montes illius provincie*" trans. by D. Pringle 2012, 121. See also De Sandoli 1983, 270–273 and for the extensive bibliography, see Frösén – Miettunen 2008, 19–20 note 142.

483 The description of the monastic community of Mount Sinai visited by Thietmar at the end of his pilgrimage is very different. See Peterman – Schick 1996; Pringle 1998; Walmsley 2001, 534; Frösén – Miettunen 2008, 14.

484 Frösén – Miettunen 2008, 14.

485 The small Muslim shrine at the top of Jabal Haroun was constructed in the time of Sultan Nasir. See Walmsey 2001, 534; Frösén – Miettunen 2008, 15.

486 Peterman – Schick 1996, 473–480.

in 1997 with the purpose of studying the whole monastic complex, the results of which have recently been published[487].

The top of Jabal Haroun (1340 m.a.s.l.) is today occupied by the Muslim shrine (*weli*) built in the 13th cent. A.D. in correspondence with the burial place of Aaron, which unfortunately has not been archaeologically investigated (Fig. 134).

The monastic complex, with a trapezoid shape, measures 62 m in a north-south direction and 48 in the east-west direction and is structured around four components organized around three courtyards[488] (Fig. 135). The central portion is occupied by the basilica and the chapel. The western sector of the Byzantine monastery has a series of rooms which are independent from one another and stands on the structures of a previous Nabatean complex (1st cent. B.C. – 3rd cent. A.D.) built in front of a natural cavity in the rock and probably used as a cistern[489]. Research has indicated that some of these places, one of which can possibly be interpreted as a *triclinum*, were included in a *temenos* belonging to the previous Nabatean building[490].

The western sector was probably used for the daily activities of the monks or for the aggregation of the faithful. The building of a containment wall dated to the 12th–13th cent. A.D. suggests the long life of this wing of the monastery[491].

The sector to the north of the chapel, made up of fourteen rooms which are arranged around a large courtyard, was probably used as a hospice for the pilgrims visiting the shrine[492]. The archaeological excavations have highlighted a good stratigraphic sequence which allows the construction of the buildings to be dated to the 5th–6th centuries A.D.[493].

The southern wing was also made up of a series of rooms for production as suggested by the remains of facilities for grinding wheat[494].

The central courtyard represented the focal point of the complex on to which the building of worship looked (Fig. 136). The area paved with paving stones was characterized by the presence of a structured water system made up of three covered channels and a decantation tank which allows the discharge of water from the area of the church into a large reservoir[495].

The architectonic evolution of the church and of the chapel is structured in fourteen distinct phases of building and destruction which took place over a wide span of time from the middle of the 5th to after the 10th cent. A.D.[496]. After it was built, the church (22.6 m long and 13.6 m wide) had the form of a basilica and was divided into three naves with a central apse and two lateral *pastophoria*[497]. The pavement consisted of wide slabs of marble stone of the Proconnesian type, perhaps taken from a previous Nabatean building[498]. The *bema*, with a rectangular shape, also had a marble facing and a *synthronon*[499].

The chapel next to the church, with which it shared the northern wall, extended for 18.2 m in the east-west direction and for 6.5 m in the north-south direction[500]. The structure ended

487 Fiema *et al.* 2016.
488 Fiema 2003, 346.
489 Fiema 2012, 30; Lahelma *et al.* 2016, 17–63.
490 Lahelma *et al.* 2016, 17–63. For the description of the structures connected with the Nabatean phase, which lie outside the scope of this study, see Fiema *et al.* 2016.
491 Frösén – Fiema 2004, 13.
492 Fiema 2003, 346; Juntunen 2016, 75–107.
493 Frösén – Fiema 2004, 13.
494 MacDonald 2010, 222; Holappa – Fiema 2016, 115–128.
495 Fiema 2003, 346.
496 For a correspondence between the architectonic phases of the church and of the chapel compared with those of the monastic complex, see Fiema 2016, 588.
497 Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 104.
498 Fiema 2003, 347 and Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 112.
499 Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 109.
500 Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 112.

Fig. 134 Jabal Haroun. Aerial photo of the monastic complex and of the *weli* (© APAAME).

Fig. 135 Jabal Haroun. Aerial photo of the monastic complex (© APAAME).

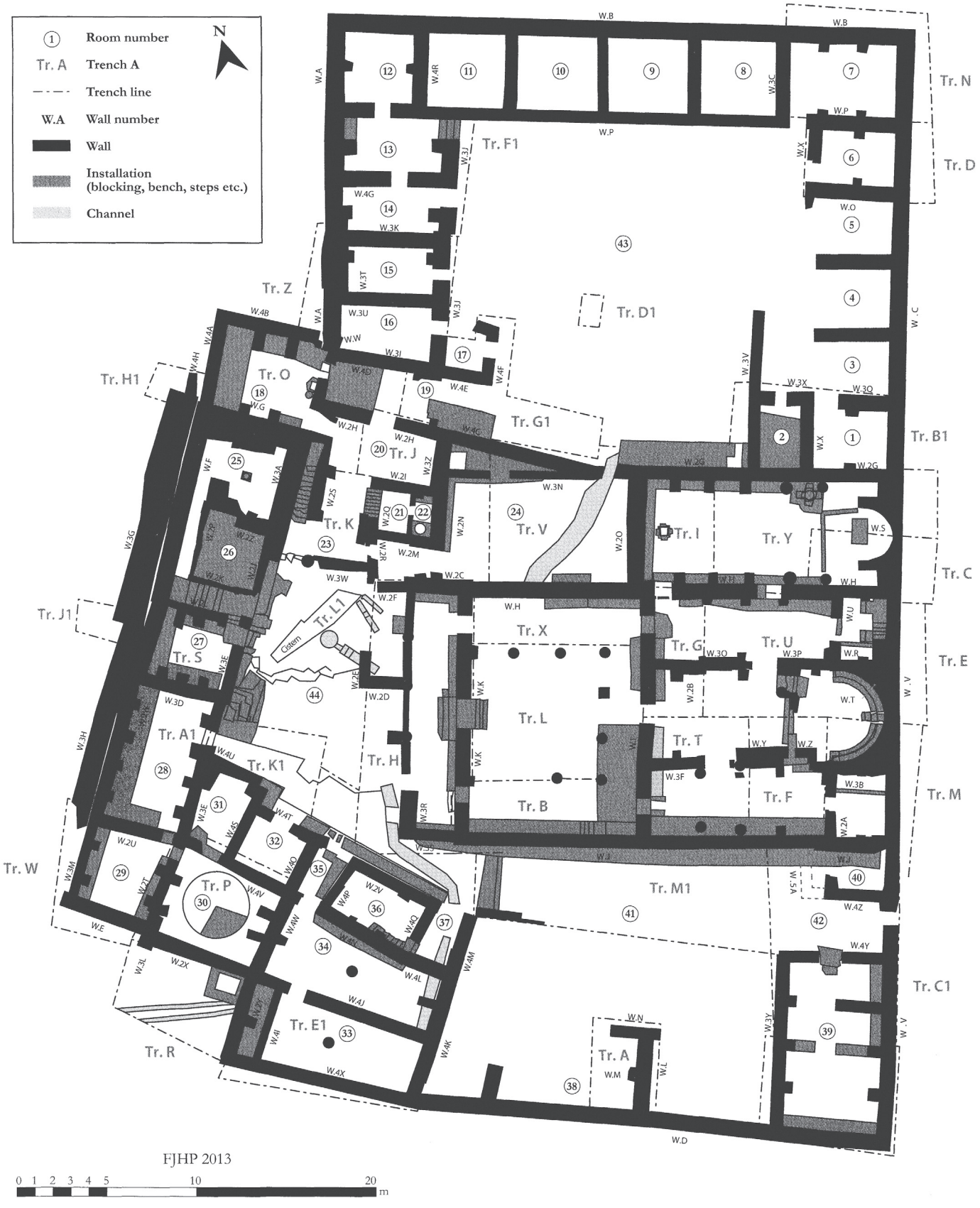

Fig. 136 Jabal Haroun. Plan of the monastic complex (after Frösén *et al.* 2016, 4.)

with an apse with two small rooms on the sides. A baptismal font placed in a ditch was at the end of the chapel, the *bema* of which must have been characterized by marble liturgical furnishings[501]. The typology of the baptistery, although common in many monastic complexes, is found above all in monasteries associated with a devotional place frequented by pilgrims[502]. A fragment of mosaic plaster has the term Πρόδρομος, because it was probably connected with the rite of baptism[503].

Following a disastrous natural event in the middle of the 6th cent.[504], the church underwent a substantial modification with it being divided into two distinct segments. The eastern part continued to function as a building of worship, while the western part was transformed into an open courtyard surrounded by a *triportico*[505]. The renovation entailed the replacement of the columns by a system of arches resting on pilasters, the lowering of the level of the *bema* (defined laterally by two low walls) and the inclusion of an episcopal throne at the centre of the *synthronon*[506]. The paving of the atrium in marble was replaced by blocks of local sandstone under which channels were built to collect rainwater. This had a mosaic, unfortunately damaged by later iconoclastic actions, characterized by armed human beings and wild animals with an almost symmetrical layout of the motifs on both sides of the central door of the atrium[507].

A second destruction, in the first half of the 7th cent. A.D., entailed a subsequent phase of rebuilding in which the majority of the previous architectonic elements under examination were replaced by other simpler ones in masonry[508]. A new system of short arches in the north-south direction was conceived to support the roof, while the interiors of the basilica and of the chapel were rebuilt and at the northern end of the *bema* a structure of steps, plastered like an ambo, was completed. A new baptismal font and an altar base in masonry were installed in the chapel, perhaps to house relics brought here from the shrine on the top of the mountain[509].

The earthquake in A.D. 749 damaged the church so badly that the monastic community renounced rebuilding it and the ruined parts were used to live in, whilst the chapel remained the only place for worship[510].

During the 9th cent. A.D., probably following a further catastrophe, the church and the chapel completely lost every type of religious function, but pottery sherds from the middle of the Abbasid period show that a monastic community was still active on the top of Jabal Haroun[511].

The archaeological accounts relative to the last phases support the hypothesis that the site was frequented until the middle of the 13th cent. A.D., in agreement with the literary sources[512]. After this date, the whole complex was gradually abandoned.

501 Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 112.
502 Fiema 2003, 348. On the topic, see Ben Pechat 1990.
503 Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 116.
504 The sources attest two intense earthquakes in A.D. 551 and 559 with the epicentre in Wadi ‘Araba. See in detail Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 119 and relative bibliography.
505 Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 119–120.
506 Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 120–129.
507 For a detailed analysis of the mosaics, see the discussion in Hamarneh – Hinkkanen 2008, 247–262.
508 Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 136.
509 Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 136.
510 Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 148.
511 Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 148. 159–164.
512 For the last phases, see Mikkola *et al.* 2008, 164–170; Fiema 2016.

4. SETTLEMENT AND DAILY LIFE IN THE MONASTIC COMMUNITY OF MOUNT NEBO

Taking into consideration daily life in the monastery of Mount Nebo, it is natural to wonder how monks were able to settle in an environment that was often hostile with a minimum of food resources at their disposal. However, this idea of a monastic life, which rejects superfluous goods in favour of extreme isolation, is frequently influenced by hagiographic accounts. The monastic foundations were effectively not only places of contemplation and hesychasm but also large estates that could ensure the survival of the monks who lived there.

This chapter concentrates on those social and economic issues which contributed to the development of the coenobitic community, dwelling in particular on the case of Mount Nebo. Beginning with a general description of the complex of the Memorial of Moses, which allows rethinking the old excavation data with the new discoveries shown in the first two chapters, the analysis studies in depth the organizational aspects of the monastery, the agricultural production in the area of Mount Nebo and the relative connections between the nucleus of Siyagha and the colonies of monks who lived in the surrounding valleys. These elements help outline a new reflection on the possible income of the monastery, on the forms of religious and secular euergetism and on the role played by money inside the monastic community.

4.1 THE *COENOBIUM* OF SIYAGHA: FRAMING THE MONASTIC SPACES

The monastic complex standing on the top of Mount Nebo (Ras Siyagha) is the result of a long series of building developments which followed on one another over the centuries around the shrine of Moses. Literary sources suggest that the primitive monastic community in the region of Mount Nebo was made up of a group of hermits who lived in the caves in the valleys of ‘Uyun Musa. The pilgrim Egeria describes in her travelogue a meeting she had with a group of ascetic monks who lived in cells close to the Spring of Moses[513]. She also mentions a small church that was probably intended for the liturgical functions of the community.

The territorial surveys carried out in the ‘Uyun Musa together with the analysis of the archive photos and the reading of the travel reports of the first modern explorers made it possible to document numerous rocky cavities – often artificially closed with masonry, but unfortunately little preserved today – which have internally some benches[514] (Fig. 137). These caves had a peculiar view of Mount Nebo and they were placed at a certain height from the ground to allow the perfect isolation necessary to reach the ascetic virtues of immateriality and *apathia*[515]. The same settlement pattern is found in a series of rock cavities discovered beyond the boundary of the later monastic complex[516].

Two hermitages have been identified on the western ridge of Mount Nebo (Fig. 138). On the northwest slope S. Saller discovered the hermitage nos. 106–109 made up of two rock

513 It. Eg. 10, 9; 11, 1–3. On the rock hermitages in the province of *Arabia*, see Piccirillo 1992, 18 and Hamarneh 2014.

514 Musil 1907, 340–346.

515 Maguire 1996, 66–67; Hamarneh 2014, 361.

516 In particular, the group of rooms nos. 106–109, located on the north-western slope made up of two rocky cavities and two rooms with mosaic floors. Remains of other hermitages have been identified by the author on the so-called summit of *Agri Specula*. See Saller 1941, 187–193.

Fig. 137 Memorial of Moses. Rock hermitages in ‘Uyun Musa.

caves and two rooms that opened on a central space with mosaic floor[517]. The two caves were later used as a cistern and burial chamber. On the southwest ridge there is the hermitage of the Abbot Procapis dated between the 5th and the first decades of the 6th cent. A.D.[518] The small and completely independent building consists of several rooms (some paved with geometric mosaics) built on two floors with a cistern for the water supply[519].

Whilst enjoying a form of particular independence, it has to be emphasized that the hermitages depended administratively on a *laura* or on a monastery located in their vicinity. The isolated life led by the monks during the week alternated with a community meeting at the main monastery for the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist and the supply of food[520].

In A.D. 430 and 477 Peter the Iberian, Bishop of Maiumas in Gaza, made two journeys to Mount Nebo[521]. The text by his biographer John Rufus reports that Peter met an ascetic monk who lived as a recluse in one of the many monastic dwellings built around the sanctuary of Moses[522]. The source not only attests the presence of recluses in the Mount Nebo region (Fig. 167), but also provides a detailed description of a cell lived in by a monk, about 5 cubits long and not very well lit[523].

The excavations of S. Saller proved that the monastic complex at Siyagha consists of a series of courtyards with buildings grouped around them (Figs. 139–140). Considering the excavation

517 Saller 1941, 186–193.
518 Piccirillo 1998b, 202.
519 Piccirillo 1998b, 199–203.
520 For more on this topic, see in particular Rousseau 2000, 749 and the relative bibliography.
521 Peter the Iberian met an Egyptian monk, who escaped from the attacks of the Mazices at the monasteries of Sketes. See Saller 1941, 110; Piccirillo 1998b, 193–194; Piccirillo 2002, 100–102.
522 Joh. Rufus. V. Petri Ib. 83–85.
523 Joh. Rufus. V. Petri Ib. 85.

Fig. 138 Memorial of Moses. Northern slope of Mount Nebo, detail of the hermitage nos. 106–109 (© APAAME).

finds, the scholar suggests that the oldest monastic cells dated to the 5th cent. A.D. were those built around the atrium facing the façade of the church (nos. 14–28)[524]. Some cells had mosaic floors with white tesserae and stone benches, perhaps used as beds by monks[525]. It is possible to imagine that these rooms were destined for the dwelling of the monks. Rooms nos. 16 and 17, initially connected in a single room, had a mosaic decorated with geometric motifs[526]. Due to their large size, S. SALLER suggests that they could be used for the community life, perhaps as the refectory and the pantry kitchen of the monastery. Room no. 24 with its dimensions and mosaic floor was also not the cell of a monk, but a community room.

Noteworthy is room no. 21 located in the centre of the western wing and directly opposite to the main entrance of the basilica. Under the mosaic floor of the room, three tombs containing the bones of ca. one hundred bodies were found[527]. The position of the funerary room could be related to the burial placed in the middle of the church's nave, as well as the three burials situated in the funeral room located behind the church presbytery[528]. In the tombs no funeral objects were found, but only some coins, a ring, tacks or rivets and buckles with crosses which suggest that the buried individuals probably belonged to the monastic clergy. The other rooms of this group, located near the narthex of the basilica were probably intended for some liturgical functions performed inside the ecclesiastical building. Examination of masonry stratigraphy of these rooms suggest that further building phases were made in the second half of the 6th cent. A.D.

524 Saller 1941, 117–131; Piccirillo 1998b, 204. The northern entrance of the atrium of the basilica was discovered in August 2016.

525 Rooms no. 14 and 15 have fragments of mosaic floor, while rooms nos. 26–27 are surfaced with mortar. Saller 1941, 118–121. 130.

526 For the analytic mosaic analysis, see Saller 1941, 241–244.

527 Saller 1941, 126–127; Sanmorì 1998, 414.

528 For an updated study of the burials of the monastic complex of Mount Nebo, see Bianchi 2018.

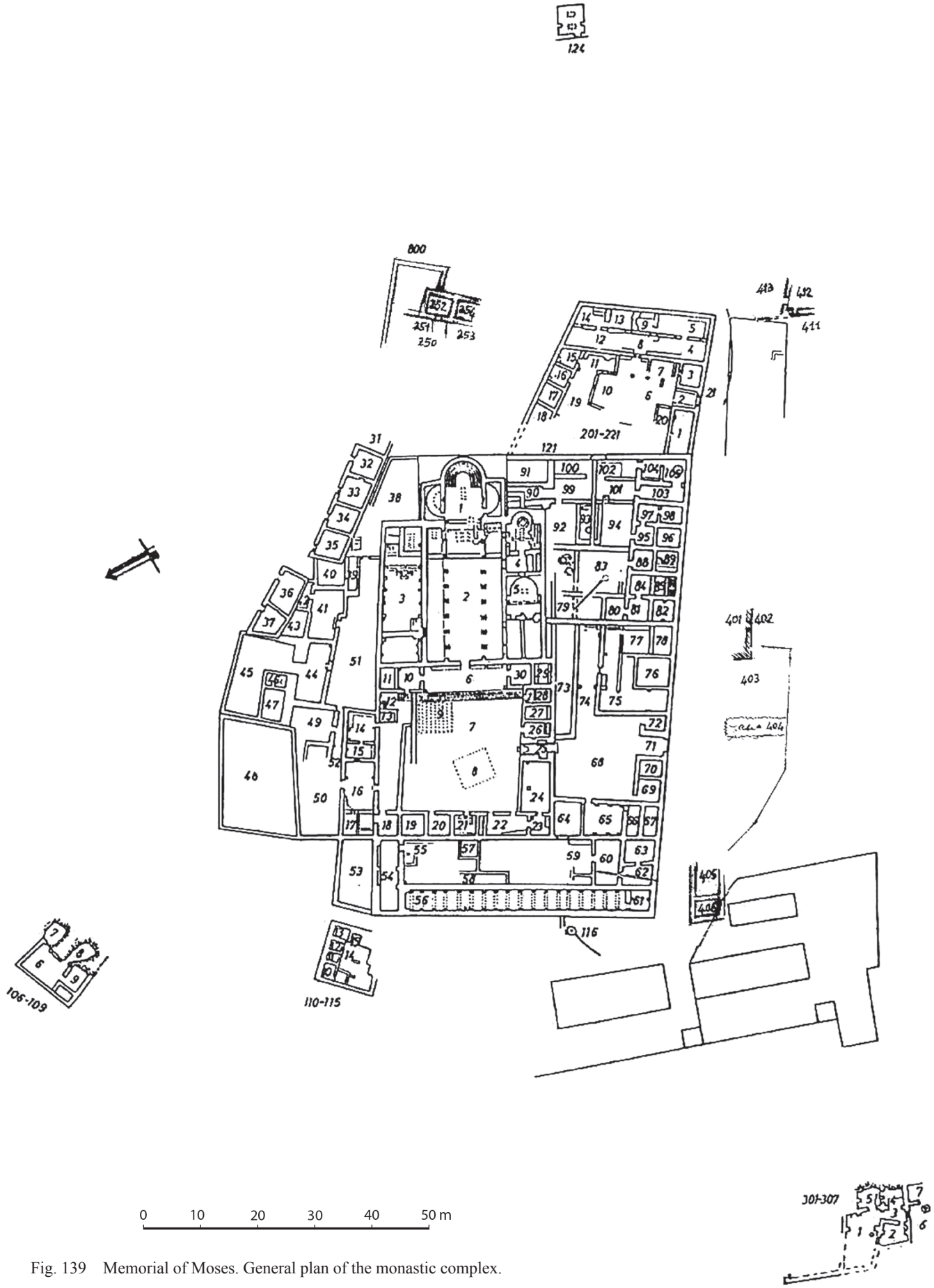

Fig. 139 Memorial of Moses. General plan of the monastic complex.

Fig. 140 Memorial of Moses. Aerial photo of the monastic complex (© APAAME).

The northern wing of the monastery develops on the slopes located on the northern side of the basilica and atrium. The rooms nos. 36–37 have a quadrangular shape and a threshold facing the valley. The excavation of S. Saller and the subsequent survey carried out by A. Acconci and N. Grande indicates that these rooms, probably monastic cells, can be dated to the middle of the 5th cent. A.D.[529]. After the destruction which occurred during the second half of the 6th centuries, the cells were covered by the rubble from the apse of the church and were no longer rebuilt.

After the renovation of the basilica, in the second half of the 6th cent. A.D.[530], new sectors of the monastery, including groups of two or four rooms connected with one another, were built on top of a series of artificial terraces along the northern and western sides of the complex[531]. The *loci* nos. 40–49 arranged on terraces of different levels have at least three construction phases from the end of the 5th to the end of the 6th cent. A.D.[532]. With the exception of the room no. 40, which has a mosaic floor, the other rooms seem to have been intended as workshops, as shown by the ovens and fireplaces found in rooms nos. 44 and 43. The north wing of the monastery also includes enclosures nos. 45–48, 50, which have been interpreted as places for cattle breeding[533]. In the same years, the western wing was enlarged with the construction of courtyards, water drainage systems and rooms including the room no. 56 (6 × 40.60 m) characterized by a series of round arches already identified by S. Saller as a possible hospice or shelter for pilgrims visiting the shrine of Moses[534]. The long room is situated on the edge of the monastic complex and has entrances facing outwards, favouring the access of pilgrims, and the privacy of the monastic community. It should be emphasized that the room no. 61, located at the southern end of the room n. 56, is the only one with two floors[535]. It is possible to suggest that the structure allowed the connection between the room no. 56 and the group of rooms nos. 60–63.

Another monastic sector, only partially excavated, was built north-east of the Basilica, along the slope of Mount Nebo[536]. It consists of a series of rooms (nos. 800–804) dated to the 6th cent. A.D. and then abandoned after the collapse of the apse of the basilica occurred after the second half of the 6th cent. A.D.[537].

The southern wing of the monastery was characterized by a dynamic development of the space. The western sector consists of a courtyard (no. 68) cells (nos. 64–67, 69–77, 75–78), some paved with mosaic floor and others with stones, a walled area (no. 73) and passages[538]. In the south-western corner of room no. 75, a single burial with typical female grave goods was found[539]. Unfortunately, the lack of an anthropological bone analyst does not allow us to confirm the identity of the deceased, but the particular type of funeral equipment consisting of few glass bracelets, some beads and a spatula would suggest the burial of a female donor. The eastern section of the monastery preserves evidence of many construction phases, the most recent of which date back to the Umayyad period, probably after the earthquake of A.D. 749 as evidenced by the last archaeological investigations into the room no. 103[540]. The rectangular

529 Saller 1941, 135–140; Acconci – Grande 1995, 499–503.
530 More in detail for the new interpretation of the architectonic phases, see Chapter 1, 70–80.
531 Saller 1941, 144–186.
532 In particular, the rooms nos. 42–43 have walls that overlap the walls of rooms nos. 36–37.
533 Saller 1941, 144.
534 This room is the largest in the monastery and measures 6 × 40.60 m. It was excavated in 1933 and continued in the 1986–1987 campaigns directed by M. Piccirillo and by G. Vannini. See Saller 1941, 155–160; Piccirillo 1986, 349. For the study of the pottery from this room, see Vanni Desideri 2012.
535 For the description of rooms nos. 60–61, see Saller 1941, 160–163.
536 Pappalardo 2010.
537 Callegher 2012.
538 Saller 1941, 164–169.
539 Saller 1941, 168.
540 Already S. Saller reported two employment levels in the southern monastic sector; Saller 1941, 169. For the results of the latest excavation surveys see Chapter 2, 100–108.

module of the cells fostered a sequence of organized growth that allowed best advantage to be taken of the pre-existing structures and facilitated roofing the rooms. As for the structure of the rooms, during the excavations, not only many monastic cells (nos. 81–82, 84–85, 95–98) were found, but also remains of workshops with basin-lavatory (no. 89), areas for preparing and serving food and bakeries with ovens (nos. 93, 103–105)[541].

The monastic sector with rooms nos. 201–221 was identified by E. ALLIATA during the 1983–1985 campaigns, including a stratigraphic excavation and the analytical study of the pottery[542]. This wing of the monastery, which constitutes a unitary group surrounded by a wall, extends to the southeast of the complex. The southern entrance leads from the outside to the central courtyard through a covered vestibule with two stone benches along the walls (no. 202)[543]. The courtyard was surrounded on three sides by a large portico overlooking the rooms. The room no. 201 is the only one with a mosaic floor with white tesserae dated back to the late 5th cent. A.D., while other rooms were built in the second half of the 6th cent. A.D.[544]. On the northern and southern sides of the portico there were three monastic cells (nos. 203, 215–216) and a storage-room (nos. 17); on the eastern side a large pillared hall (ca. 25 m long). Although the function of the hall remains unknown, E. ALLIATA suggests that these rooms could be used as an accommodation for pilgrims or as the infirmary for sick monks[545]. Some restorations in the hall took place in the first half of the 8th cent. A.D., showing an occupation of this sector even in the Umayyad period[546]. The Umayyad pottery sherds from the hall are of the same type as those found in the most recent stratigraphic layers of the south-eastern wings (especially in room no. 103) and under the *synthronon*[547]. These data suggest that the last restoration of the complex dates after the earthquake that struck the region in A.D. 749[548].

Another archaeological record that suggests the continuity of the monastic life at Mount Nebo at the beginning of the Abbasid era is the content of the mosaic inscription found in the southern nave of the church of St Stephen in Umm er-Rasas (dated to A.D. 758)[549]. The text recalls the donation of Kaium, monk and priest of Phisga (the name of Mount Nebo used in the Hebrew Bible)[550] thus confirming the presence of a community of monks up to the 9th cent. A.D.[551] (Fig. 162).

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541 Saller 1941, 169–186.

542 Alliata 1990a.

543 Alliata 1990a, 464.

544 E. ALLIATA's excavation did not provide other information about the phase context. See Alliata 1990a, 463.

545 E. ALLIATA takes into consideration both the dimensions of the hall and the comparanda found in the monasteries of the region. See Alliata 1990a, 464–465.

546 In this phase the hall was divided into smaller rooms, perhaps destined for workshops as shown by the stone benches found in rooms nos. 209 and 2014; see Alliata 1990a, 465–466.

547 Chaper 2, 106–108.

548 Cf. what is stated in Chapter 1, 80.

549 Piccirillo 1994a, 251–252.

550 Κύριε μνήσ/θιτη τοῦ δ/ούλου συο Κ/αηουμ μον/αχοῦ πρ(εσβυτέρ)ου Φισγα. (Remember, Lord, your servant Kaioum monk and priest of Phisga). For the edition and comment of the epigraphic text, see Piccirillo 1994a, 251–252.

551 Numerous epigraphic elements which confirm a continuity of life in the monasteries up to the 9th cent. A.D. are recorded in the complexes in the province of *Arabia*. In particular, the restoration activities of the mosaic pavements, dated to the 8th cent. A.D., are attested in the monasteries of Mar Liyas near Tishbe, in the complex of Deir 'Ain 'Abata and above all in the monastery of Aaron on Jabal Haroun. See in detail Di Segni 2006, 579–580; Politis 2012, 115–158 and Rajala – Fiema 2008, 240–241. On the questions relative to the transition between the Umayyad and the Abbasid periods, see Hamarneh 2003, 223–229; Walmsley 2005; Haldon 2006 and Hamarneh 2012.

4.2 THE MANAGEMENT OF THE MONASTERY

The monastery of Mount Nebo was not only an important religious centre for monks and pilgrims, but it was also involved in the management of farming land and agriculture. Although mainly devoted to prayer, the daily life of monks was marked by a series of activities linked to their sustenance and the possible accommodation of pilgrims. Hagiographic sources recall many monks with specific skills, who carried out these practical activities[552]. The various monastic offices assigned on 1st September generally lasted for one year, but in some cases they could be reiterated for longer[553]. The monks' services included those of the baker, the cook, and the head of the infirmary and guesthouse and of the mule tracks[554]. The liturgical responsibilities, on the other hand, were entrusted to a *canonarca* (responsible for the celebration of the Divine Office) and a *cimeliarca* (custodian of the sacred vessels and vestments)[555].

Although no literary source refers to the tasks performed by the monks of Mount Nebo, the epigraphs of the mosaic floors give some data about the titles of the monks. The monks (whose Greek appellative was μοναχός or μονάζων), some of whom could also be deacons (διάκονοι) and/or presbyters (πρεσβύτεροι) were ruled by an hegumen (ἡγούμενος – πατὴρ ἡμῶν)[556].

One important monastic office related to the management of the monasteries was that of the *oikonomos* (οἰκονόμος). This steward was in charge of the income of fields and properties of a diocese on behalf of the bishop, or of the administration of an individual church or monastery[557]. Although the term *oikonomos* does not appear in any text in the Siyagha Monastery, in the mosaic inscription found in the monastery of Kayanos at 'Uyun Musa the *oikonomos* Salaman is recalled[558]. Despite the fact that it is not possible to state whether Salaman was a monk or acted on the behalf of the Madaba bishopric, he gave material and financial support to build the monastic church of Kayanos.

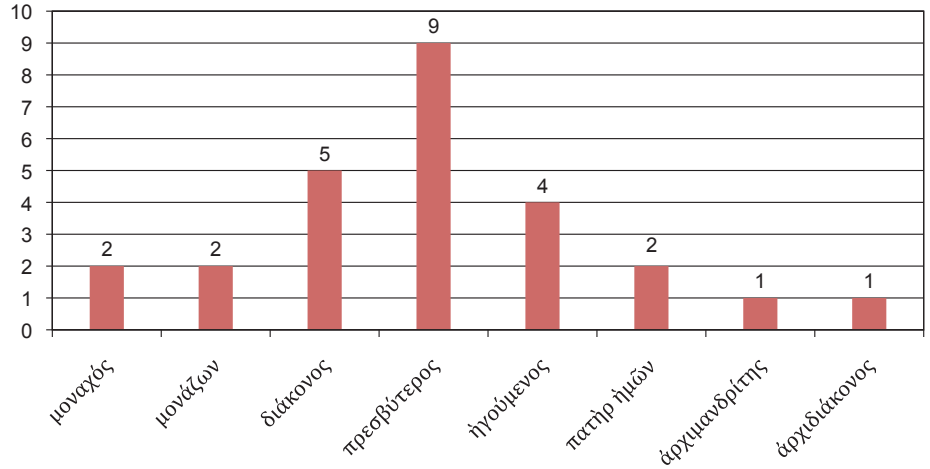

Diagram 2 Monastic Titles in the Mount Nebo Region

552 See for example the monastic duties of Cyriac in the Laura of Suka (V. Cir. 7).
553 Perrone 1990, 43.
554 Schwartz 1939, 228, 304.
555 Perrone 1990, 43.
556 For the analysis of epigraphs, see Di Segni 1998, 466–467.
557 Palestinian *lauras* had their own stewards already in the 4th cent. A.D. Di Segni 1998, 440. 451, note 49. On the occurrences of the term *oikonomos* in the provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia*, see Meimaris 1986, 256–259.
558 Di Segni 1998, 453.

4.2.1 The monastic landscape

For a definition of the monastic landscape of the Nebo region it is important to point out that from the second half of the 5th cent. A.D. many monastic complexes in the provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia* became agricultural estates well integrated in the growing rural economy of the region[559]. Papyrus documents found in the excavation of the Byzantine church in Petra show that the ecclesiastical organizations obtained income from farming land and that in some cases the land was leased according to a perpetual formula[560]. The Arabic adjective *haram* or *aram* which, in the testaments or legal documents of dispute often accompanied the name of some land properties, seems to allude to the Greek ἱερα-γῆ (hiera-ge) and therefore may refer to possessions of the Church or administered on behalf of the diocese[561]. More specifically for the monasteries, some parallels with the Egyptian context show how the pieces of land often came within the donations to the monastic complexes, which were usually administered in order to draw great profit from them[562]. Some lands could, on the other hand, be purchased with a standard contract between a member of the clergy and a private seller[563]. Agriculture was often practiced by monks in fields that in some cases belonged to their monastery[564]. Although they are later textual sources, the byzantine *typika* mention the monastic gardens and orchards as paradises on Earth where the abbot as a spiritual gardener could nurture the monks' spiritual growth[565].

The juridical and topographical analysis of the Mount Nebo region is not an easy task, due to the obvious lack of written accounts on it and because the archaeological surveys were mainly concentrated on the study of the individual building structures, but not on the interrelations between the monasteries and the rural landscape. To approach this question, it is important to focus on the material culture which provides a memory to the ancient farming environment of Mount Nebo.

The agricultural activities for the production of vegetables and cereals, crops widely used in the monastic diet, were practiced in the cultivated plots that extended along the slopes of Mount Nebo near the Siyagha monastery (Fig. 141). The land exploitation system often required two important components: the construction of retaining walls to regularize the arable surface of the mountain and the proximity to seasonal *wadis*. The latter flowed down widely on the slopes of Mount Nebo: on the east is the Wadi Afrit, with its offshoots the Wadi el-Kanisah and the Wadi Judeideh; on the north are the Wadi en-Naml and the Wadi 'Uyun Musa[566] (Fig. 2). Part of the water could be channelled into two large cisterns (nos. 122[567] and 136[568]) and used to irrigate the fields (Fig. 143). A closer parallel is found at the sanctuary of Lot at Deir 'Ain 'Abata where a large cistern built at the southern tip of the monastery conveyed the water from a local *wadi*[569] (Fig. 132).

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559 The growth and prosperity of the rural settlements in the areas of Transjordan can be traced back to the 4th cent. A.D., when the imperial policy encouraged those who had financial resources to invest in the private property of the land and its development. On the Diocletian reorganization of the tax system, see Seston 1946, 280; Jones 1964, I, 61–65; Carrié 1994; Kuhoff 2001, 484.

560 On this topic, see Hamarneh 2010, 62–63.

561 Kaimio – Koenen 1997, 461.

562 Brenk 2004, 454; Hamarneh 2010, 63.

563 The papyrus of Petra no. 25 shows a deed of purchase between a presbyter of the church or monastery of St and Martyr Theodore of Ammatha, and a deacon for a piece of cultivable and well irrigated land (γεωργία) defined *epoikon* in the village of Augustopolis. The transaction was recorded in the archives of *hypodektai* of Petra in the years A.D. 558–559. See Arjava *et al.* 2007, 79–80 quoted in Hamarneh 2010, 63.

564 Hagiographic sources mention that the Monastery of St Saba and Choziba had private gardens and orchards used to grow vegetables. On this topic, see Di Segni 1991, 128–129 and Hamarneh (forthcoming).

565 Talbot 2002, 46–53.

566 Saller 1941, 2.

567 Saller 1941, 201–202 fig. 25, table 22, 1.

568 Saller 1941, 204–206 figs. 3. 26; table 160.

569 Politis 2012, 115–123.

Fig. 141 Memorial of Moses. Aerial photo of the rural landscape of Mount Nebo.

Fig. 142 Memorial of Moses. Aerial photo of Ras Siyagha.

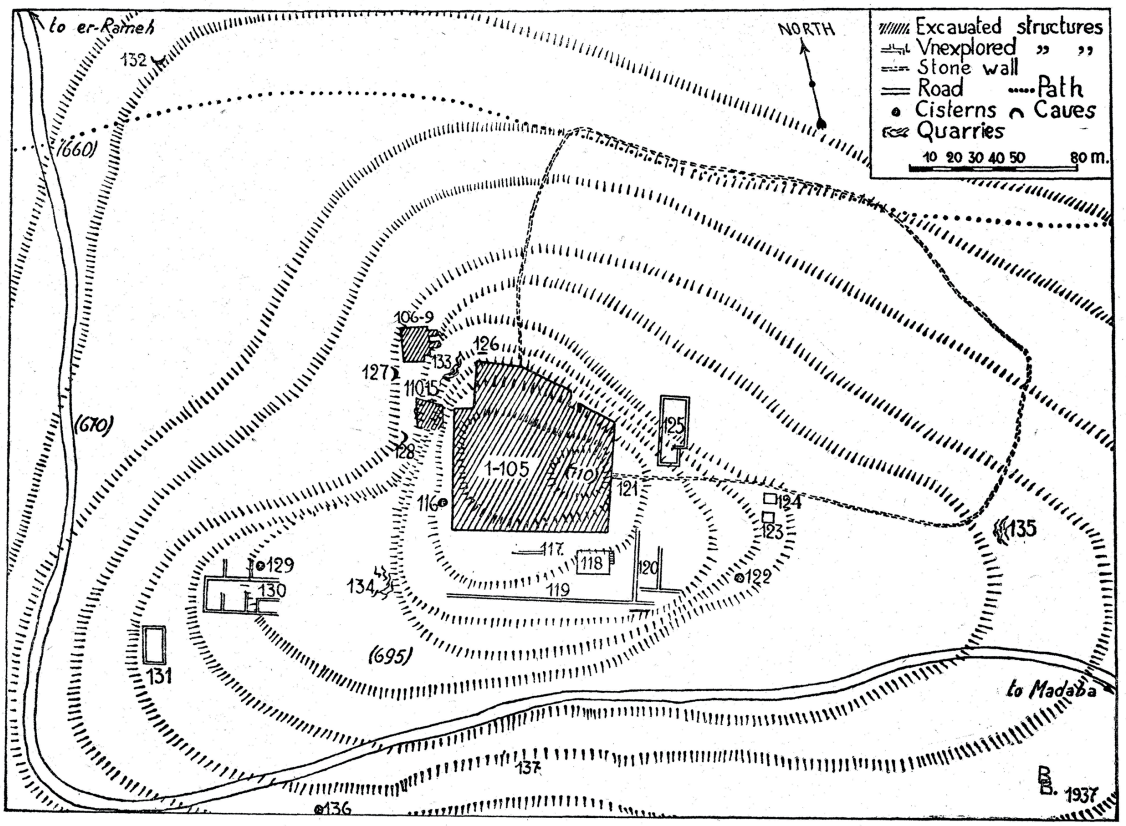

Fig. 143 Memorial of Moses. Plans of the farming structures identified after the excavation by SALLER (1937) (after Saller 1941, 4).

Fig. 144 Memorial of Moses. Southern slope of Mount Nebo.

Regarding the retaining wall, S. SALLER reports the existence of some rows pertaining to a regular wall developed south of the monastery and probably used as a support for agricultural tillage (no. 117 in Fig. 143). Similar walls were built on the southern slope of the mountain perhaps in order to protect cisterns and water supply systems of the complex[570] (no. 119 in Fig. 143). Despite the fact that the recent building work on the southern slope of Siyagha prevented recognizing the traces documented by S. SALLER, it is possible to identify this area as the main agricultural sector of the complex (Fig. 144). The soil composition of this land partially protected by the strong winds coming from the northern and western sides of the mountain seems to have been the most suitable for the cultivation of crops.

Due to the lack of papyri and ostraca no document provides data on what form, and how many cultivated plots belonged to the monastery of Siyagha. In addition, the absence of boundary markers or specific epigraphic references does not allow an understanding of the division between the lands and fields cultivated by the monastic community and those by the peasants of Khirbet el-Mukhayyat, a village located only 4.8 kilometres away[571].

However, the relationship between the monastery and the rural communities could be interpreted according to a form of social interrelation in which the monks exercised spiritual guidance over the lay inhabitants of the area and the settlements often contributed to the sustenance of the monastic clergy[572]. It is worth noting that the rural lands were included in the territorial jurisdiction of the diocesan centres and the local clergy was directly involved in the management of the land exploitation[573]. The bishop, as shown in the papyri of Petra, was not only active with

570 Saller 1941, 199–207.

571 For the parallel cases, see Dragon 1979; Walmsley 2005.

572 In the western Galilee and Jordan, numerous small monasteries have been identified equipped with production facilities in the immediate vicinity of rural villages, suggesting that the two realities were often connected in land use. See Hamarneh 2012; Ashkenazi – Aviam 2013.

573 On this topic, see Dragon 1979, 44–47; Meimaris 1986, 214–217; Feissel 1989, 814–818; Hamarneh 2003, 225–226.

Fig. 145 Memorial of Moses. View of the northern slope of Mount Nebo from ‘Uyun Musa.

his ecclesiastical patronage, but also exercised a civil authority in regulating the deeds of sale, in the application of wills and in territorial disputes between the peasants[574].

The analysis of the land exploitation system in Mount Nebo region should take into consideration the relationship between the *coenobium* of Siyagha and the small monasteries in the surrounding valleys. At ‘Uyun Musa there are two springs that flow from the northern side of Siyagha; today, the water is used to irrigate gardens, as it most likely would have been in Late Antiquity. The valley of ‘Uyun Musa has a mild climate, fertile soil and the presence of a perennial water source that supports the cultivation of crops (Fig. 145). Egeria mentions that the oldest monastic community that accompanied pilgrims to the Memorial of Moses resided in the valley[575]. In addition, the mosaic inscription in the monastery of Kayanos bears the name of Rabebos, who was most probably the hegumen mentioned in the dedicatory inscription of the funerary chapel at Siyagha[576].

As far as farming production is concerned, it seems that the monastic structures of the valleys enjoyed a relative degree of self-sufficiency. The monastic complexes often had their own wine presses or grain mills as shown by the production facilities of the monastery of el-Kanisah in the Wadi Afrit[577]. It is therefore possible that the monastic complex of Siyagha was not at the centre of an expansion of the centrifugal type, but simply supervised a small network of interconnected monasteries.

574 Hamarneh 2003, 237.

575 It. Eg. 12, 2–3.

576 L. Di Segni suggests the name Rabebos was influenced by the phonetic change of O for A, common in many inscriptions of the province of *Arabia*. Di Segni 1998, 451 no. 58. On the monastery of Kayanos in the valley of ‘Uyun Musa, see Piccirillo – Alliata 1989. For the Greek inscription in the Robebos funerary room, see Di Segni 1998, 347–348 no. 34.

577 In this monastic complex a press, a small mill for wheat and an oven were found. Piccirillo 1998b, 205–209.

The productive independence of the monasteries, even of small dimensions, seems to be confirmed by the study of the wine-producing systems of the monasteries in the provinces of *Arabia* and *Palaestina Tertia*[578]. For the diocese of Madaba, presses were found in the monasteries of Ain Qattara[579], Deir er-Riyashi[580], and in the so-called complex of the tower of the stylite and in the monastery of Umm er-Rasas[581].

Distance between the monastic complex of Siyagha and the monasteries in the valleys	
‘Uyun Musa	3.2 km
Khirbet el-Mukhayyat	4.8 km
Monastery of the Theotokos in the Wadi ‘Ain el-Kanisah	7 km
Monastery of el-Kanisah in the Wadi ‘Afrit	8 km

4.2.2 The production facilities and the dietary aspects

After the analysis of the monastic territorial organization and the exploitation of the soil, attention should be turned to the archaeological remains of the production facilities found in the monastery of Siyagha. The winepress of the monastic complex has been identified on the north-western slope of Mount Nebo (rooms nos. 110–115)[582]. The production facility was made up of a central mosaic room with a central stone for the vertical pole of the press, three small rooms at a higher level, and two drainage basins to collect the must[583] (Fig. 146). The winepress was filled up after the excavation and it was not possible to estimate the facility’s production, but the winepress found in Khirbet Yajuz, eleven kilometres north-west of Amman, with a production

Fig. 146 Memorial of Moses. Winepress of the monastery.

578 Hamarneh 2012, 289–291.
579 Piccirillo 1989a, 249–250.
580 Piccirillo 1989a, 260.
581 Piccirillo 1989a, 301–302.
582 Saller 1941, table 161.
583 The floor consists of a mosaic made of large, white tesserae. See Saller 1941, 194–195; Piccirillo 1998b, 205; Hamarneh 2003, 207.

Fig. 147 Khirbet el-Mukhayyat. Church of Saints Lot and Procopius, detail of the pressing of the wine.

Fig. 148 Khirbet el-Mukhayyat. Church of Saints Lot and Procopius, detail of the grape harvest.

Fig. 149 Memorial of Moses. The rural landscape of the Mount Nebo Region.

capacity of about 69 litres of must per hectare is a good parallel[584]. As the wine-press of the Siyagha monastery was one-third smaller than the one of Khirbet Yajuz it is possible to suggest that the wine production of this facility was limited to meeting only the needs of the monastic complex[585]. However, S. SALLER mentions a second winepress near the road between Siyagha and Khirbet el-Mukhayyat that could have belonged to the monastery and so increased the wine production of the complex[586].

Viticulture in the Mount Nebo region was certainly widespread and wine production was a widely practiced activity by local peasants, as shown by the scenes in the mosaic floor of the church of Saints Lot and Procopius found in the nearby village of Khirbet el-Mukhayyat[587] (Figs. 147–148). The grape harvesting and pressing scenes testify to the activities carried out by the villagers probably in the vineyards that extended a short distance from the Siyagha monastery or in the valleys below (Fig. 149). It is worth noting that the highest concentration of presses in the Madaba region occurs around Mount Nebo showing that the wineries were widespread in this area[588].

Wine played a vital role in the monastic community due to its religious and liturgical meaning in the Eucharist sacrament. Concerning the dietary consumption, the rules for drinking wine varied depending on the monastic community but in general the hegumens tried to limit its use[589]. From the end of the 6th cent. – beginning of the 7th cent. A.D., a more rigid monastic discipline imposed fasting from food and wine on the days of Wednesday and Friday while it was allowed on the other days of the week and in particular on Sundays[590].

584 On the installation of wine production of Khirbet Yajuz, see Khalil – al-Nammari 2000.
585 On the parallels of presses in Israel and on the method of calculating the production of wine, see Ashkenazi – Aviam 2013, 276–281. More in general on this subject, see Frankel 1997; Hirschfeld 2005 and Taxel 2008.
586 Unfortunately, it was not possible to verify the presence of this production facility. See Saller 1941, 195, note 2.
587 Piccirillo 1993, 152–158.
588 The Madaba Plains Project recorded eight Byzantine wine presses. On this topic, see Decker 2009, 140.
589 Patrich 1995, 208–209.
590 Patrich 1995, 208–209.

Fig. 150 Memorial of Moses. Two ovens in room no. 93.

Fig. 151 Memorial of Moses. Detail of the ovens in room no. 93.

The preparation and baking of bread for Eucharist and consumption purposes was mainly concentrated in the south-eastern sector of the monastic complex where the bakery of the complex was probably located. The excavations in this area revealed three ovens in rooms nos. 93, 103[591] and 105[592] (Figs. 150–151). Two more ovens were found in rooms nos. 43–44 in addition with two other ovens located a little further to the south of the monastic complex, near the modern Franciscan monastery (Fig. 152). Another oven was found in room no. 93[593]. It is not

[591] See the study of pottery in Chapter 2, 106–108.
[592] Saller 1941, 170–174; 181–182.
[593] Saller 1941, 170–174; 181–182.

Fig. 152 Memorial of Moses. Two ovens found near the modern Franciscan monastery.

possible to state whether these ovens were all active in the same chronological period, however the examination of the ceramic finds suggests that the ovens of the southern sector were also used in the Umayyad period[594]. If the room no. 56 is considered the hospice for pilgrims, the two ovens located outside the monastery and near this room could perhaps be used for the baking of bread for pilgrims. However, no bread moulds were discovered in the Mount Nebo region. Although no grain crusher has been identified in the monastic complexes of Nebo, local processing cannot be excluded[595].

[594] It. Eg. 11, 1. For a reflection on the activity of the ovens in the monastic communities, see Corbo 1958.
[595] For a list of the wheat mills discovered in the monastic complexes of Jordan, see Hamarneh 2003, 304–308.

Fig. 153 Memorial of Moses. Paleobotanical seeds from the excavation of the *synthronon*.

Fig. 154 Memorial of Moses. Paleobotanical seeds from the excavation of the *synthronon*.

During the 2012–2014 campaigns, numerous seeds were recovered during the excavation of the *synthronon* which suggests interesting information on the possible diet of the monks. In particular, olive and date stones, pistachio shells, grains of wheat and barley have been identified, together with bones of animals with signs of slaughtering, the meat of which, following the numerous monastic dietary restrictions[596], was probably only for monks who were ill and pilgrims visiting the monastery[597] (Figs. 153–154). The archaeobotanical finds recovered in the monastic complex of Siyagha agree with what is reported in the monastic hagiographic sources. The weekly diet followed by the monks included simple food such as bread, water and dates[598]. The *Life of St Saba* and the *Life of John the Hesychast* also mention carobs[599]. In particular cases the sources recall that the monks could eat simple oat soups and semolina porridge (ῥοφή[600] and σεμίδαλιν[601]).

During Sunday lunches, the meals could be enriched with various vegetable preparations (λάχανον), legumes (ὄσπριον), ψευδοτρόφιον[602], bean dishes (φάβα) as πισάιον[603] and squash dishes as κολοκύνθια[604]. The anachorets who lived in isolation in the valleys of Mount Nebo and who usually joined the community only once a week, may have eaten fresh vegetables from their gardens or pulses cooked in water[605]. In the *Life of St Mary of Egypt*, Sophronius recalls the supplies that the monks used to take with them during their peregrinations in the desert, such as figs, dates and various pulses[606]. During the anachoretic rites it was not unusual for the monks to dedicate themselves to collecting herbs or wild roots necessary for their survival. The plants recorded by Cyril of Scythopolis include μαλῶα[607], μαννούθιον[608], μελάγρια[609] and καρδία καλάμων[610]. From some sources we learn of strict regulations on the consumption of a hot beverage by the coenobite monks, called εὐκράτιον and made by fermenting pepper, cumin and aniseed[611].

596 On the regulation of the diet in Byzantine monastic documents, see Thomas *et al.* 2000, 1696–1716.
597 Jo. Mosch. prat. 65.
598 Patrich 2015, 130.
599 V. Sab. 76, 182; V. Jo. Hes. 25, 107.
600 V. Jo. Hes. 19, 215.
601 V. Geor. 43, 336.
602 V. Sab. 44, 135.
603 V. Sab. 40, 130.
604 Patrich 1995, 210; Patrich 2019, 130–131.
605 See in this regard the example in V. Cyr. 16, 232.
606 V. Marie Aeg. 74.
607 V. Euth. 50, 72; 56, 77.
608 V. Sab. 8, 92; 40, 130.
609 More in detail on the consumption of *melagria* by anachoretic monks, see Rubin 2002.
610 V. Sab. 13.
611 V. Jo. Hes. 19, 216.1.

The same products are attested in the travel accounts of the Arab geographers Ya'qubi, Baladhuri and al-Maqdisi[612], thus proving that the Balqa' region continued to be used for the cultivation of cereals, almonds, fruit and for raising sheep even under the subsequent caliphal administration[613].

4.2.3 The water system

The need for water was not only limited to farming uses, but also and perhaps above all to meet the primary needs of the monks, pilgrims and all those who frequented the shrine. The importance of water and its collection can be deduced from the significant echo that this topic had in the hagiographic texts of the *Lives* of the Palestinian monks[614]. For example, in the writings by Cyril of Scythopolis the search for water is associated with the sagacity of man and divine synergy[615].

The stratigraphic surveys carried out in the site have documented the existence of a well-structured system of supply, made up of various hydraulic components, such as pipes, sedimentation tubs, basins and collection cisterns[616]. The main reserve of water of the monastery was made up of two cisterns, dug out directly under the level of the atrium opposite the basilica[617]. Cistern no. 8 was excavated in 1996[618]. The rainwater that came from the roof of the narthex and of the neighbouring roofs was conveyed into this cistern by means of a drainage channel which came from a small basin of sedimentation found in room no. 28. This basin was used to eliminate the impurities from the water and thus make it suitable for drinking (Figs. 155–156)[619].

Cistern no. 9, also obtained by cutting the rock of the mountain, had masonry walls and was faced with waterproofing plaster[620]. The cistern was not excavated by S. Saller because the Bedouin workers were intimidated by the presence of human bones inside the structure[621].

In the north-western part of courtyard no. 83, S. Saller unearthed a drainage channel faced with ceramic slabs, which extended to a cistern on the southern side of the courtyard[622]. The channel, 2.82 m long, is made up of nine ceramic pipes (33 cm long and with a diameter of 30 cm) of which only one is preserved in its entirety. Unfortunately, during the recent assays it was not possible to check the end of the pipe, but its orientation from the basilica suggests also in this case it was to channel rainwater from the roof. Cistern no. 83, as well as being a tank for drinking water, was used by the monks to draw the water necessary for some productive activities, as suggested by the ovens found in the south-eastern sector of the monastery[623], one of which came to light during the latest surveys[624], and the basin in room no. 88[625].

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612 al-Ya'qubi 327, 20; Baladhuri 116, 20; al-Maqdisi 162, 4–6. See Hamarneh 2003, 230.
613 On this subject, see Walmsley 1997.
614 Interesting episodes are shown in the *Life of Euthymius*, in which it is recalled how one monk, after having prayed to God, excavated and was able to find the water necessary to quench Saba's thirst (V. Euth. 38); or the passage in which Saba himself, needing water for the inhabitants of his community, made a plea to God and immediately he heard the sound of a wild donkey intent on digging in the soil; he picked up the sign and imitated the animal, finding the yearned-for source of water (V. Sab. 17).
615 On the topic, see Perrone 1990, 16–17.
616 For more details on the functioning of the water systems in antiquity, see Hodge 2000, 21–34.
617 Cistern no. 8 and cistern no. 9. See Saller 1941, 77; pl. 49, 1–2. 161; Alliata 1996, 394.
618 See Chapter 2, 109–112.
619 Saller 1941, 130–131 fig. 19; pl. 54, 1–2. 161. On the systems of drainage and making water drinkable, see Wilson 2000, 151–178.
620 Saller 1941, 130–131.
621 Saller 1941, 77.
622 Saller 1941, 169–170; pl. 76, 3.
623 Ovens no. 93 and no. 105; see Saller 1941, 170–172. 181–182.
624 See in this regard the study in Chapter 2, 100–105.
625 Saller 1941, 176–178; pl. 74, nos. 1–2.

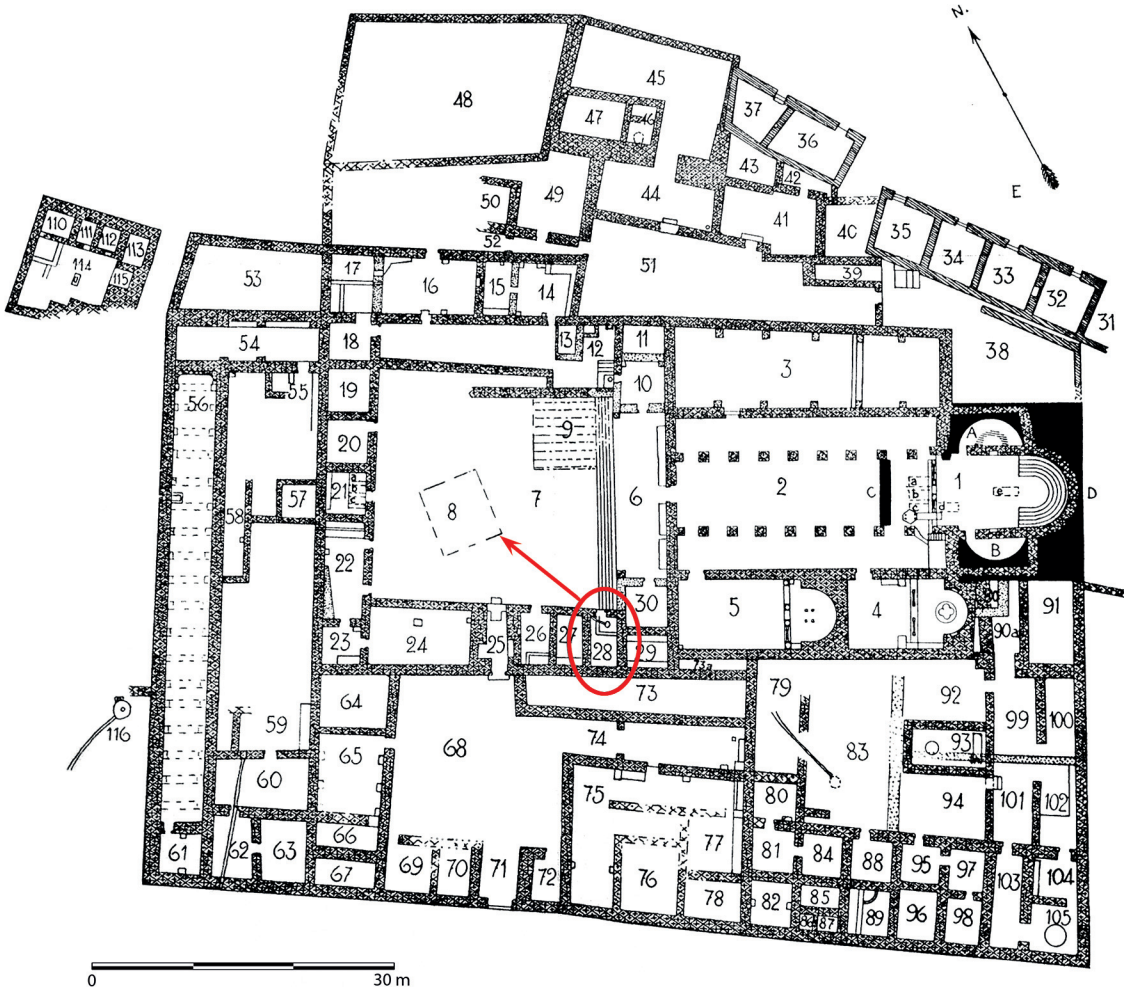

Fig. 155 Memorial of Moses. System of water channelling of cistern no. 8.

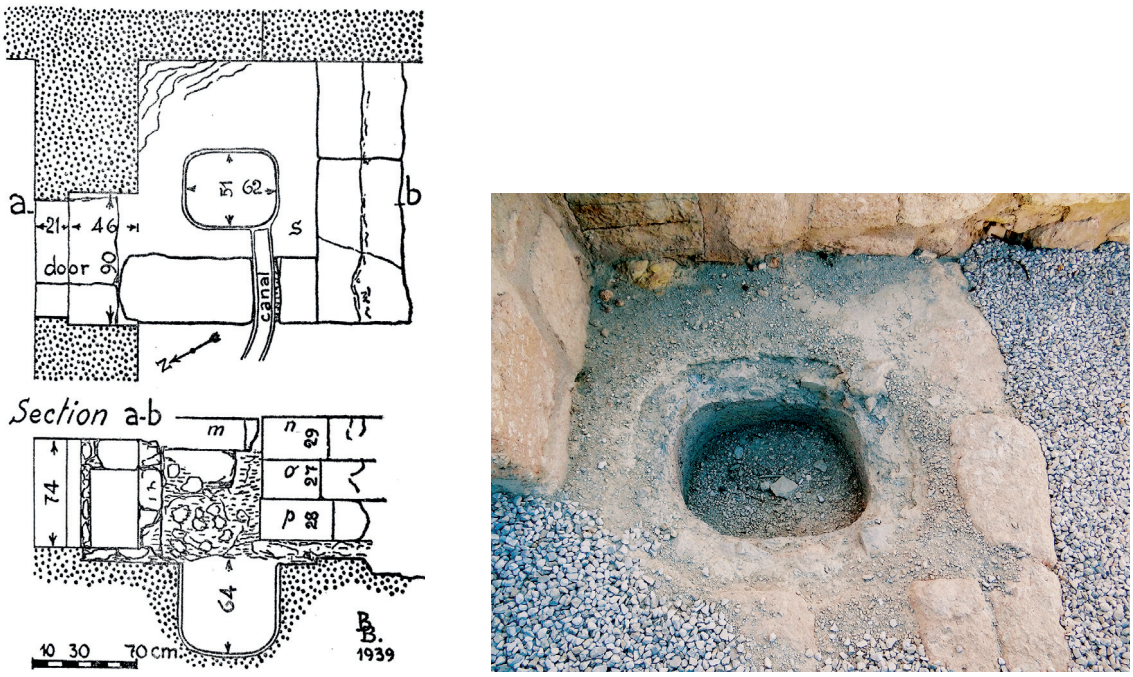

Fig. 156 Memorial of Moses. The basin and conduit in the northern part of room no. 28 (after Saller 1941, 131, fig. 19).

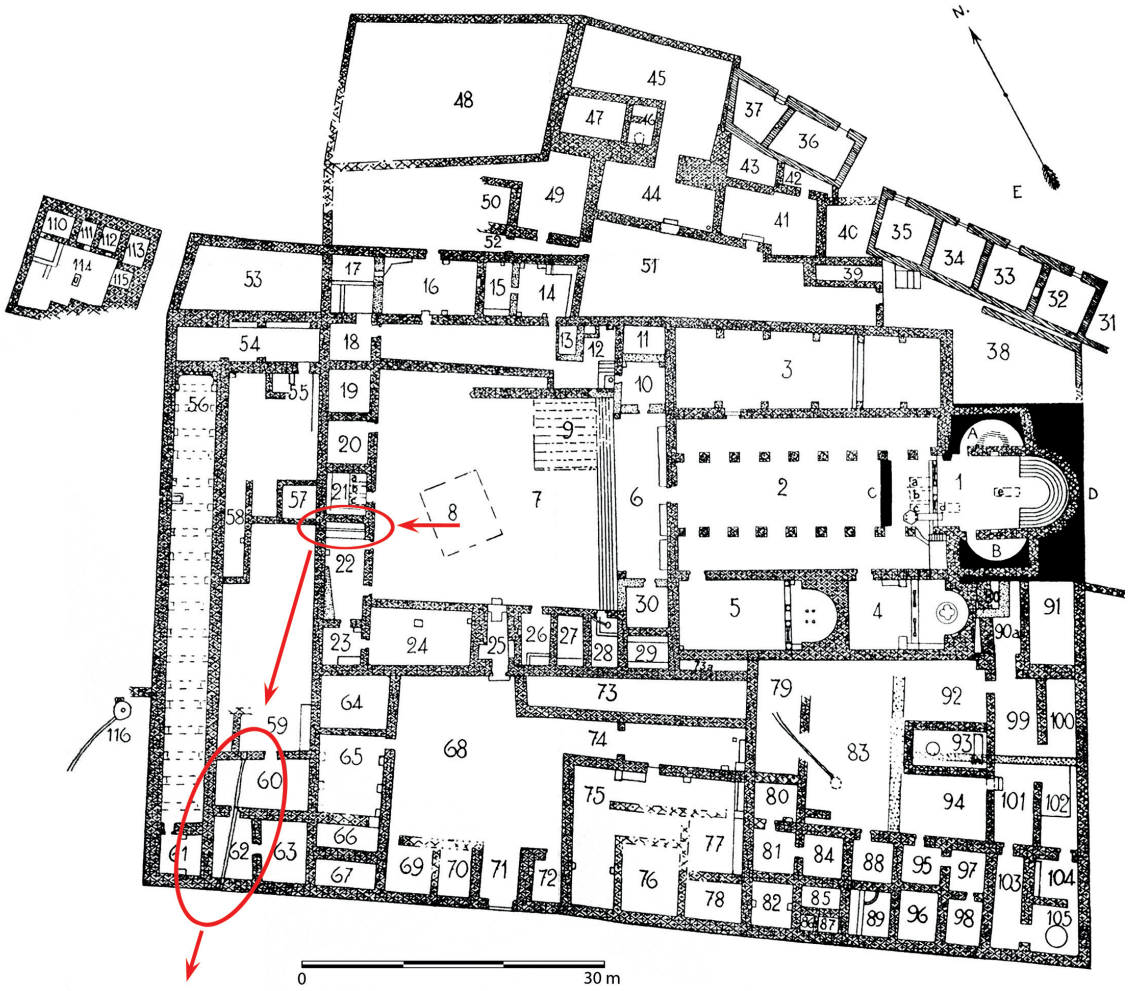

Fig. 157 Memorial of Moses. System of water disposal of the monastery.

Cistern no. 116 was built outside the walls of the monastery, near room no. 56[626]. This cistern was probably intended for those who used this room, perhaps the pilgrims who visited the Memorial of Moses[627].

For the proper functioning of the water systems, some particular elements to check the correct flow of water and identify potential problems that could arise in the system, were indispensable[628]. These components are the so-called inspection boxes, one of which, faced with slabs of earthenware, was excavated near passage no. 74[629]. Two portions of pottery pipes, recovered close to the ditch, were fitted with specific countersinks made so that the portions of the pipe could be inserted within one another reducing the loss of water to a minimum[630].

Fig. 158 Memorial of Moses. Detail of the channel in room no. 22.

626 Saller 1941, 195–196 fig. 24; pl. 67, 1. 80, 1. 160.
627 Piccirillo 1986.
628 On the subject Wilson 2000, 151–178.
629 Saller 1941, 167–168; pls. 72, 2. 74. 161.
630 Saller 1941, pls. 80, 4. 157, 50.

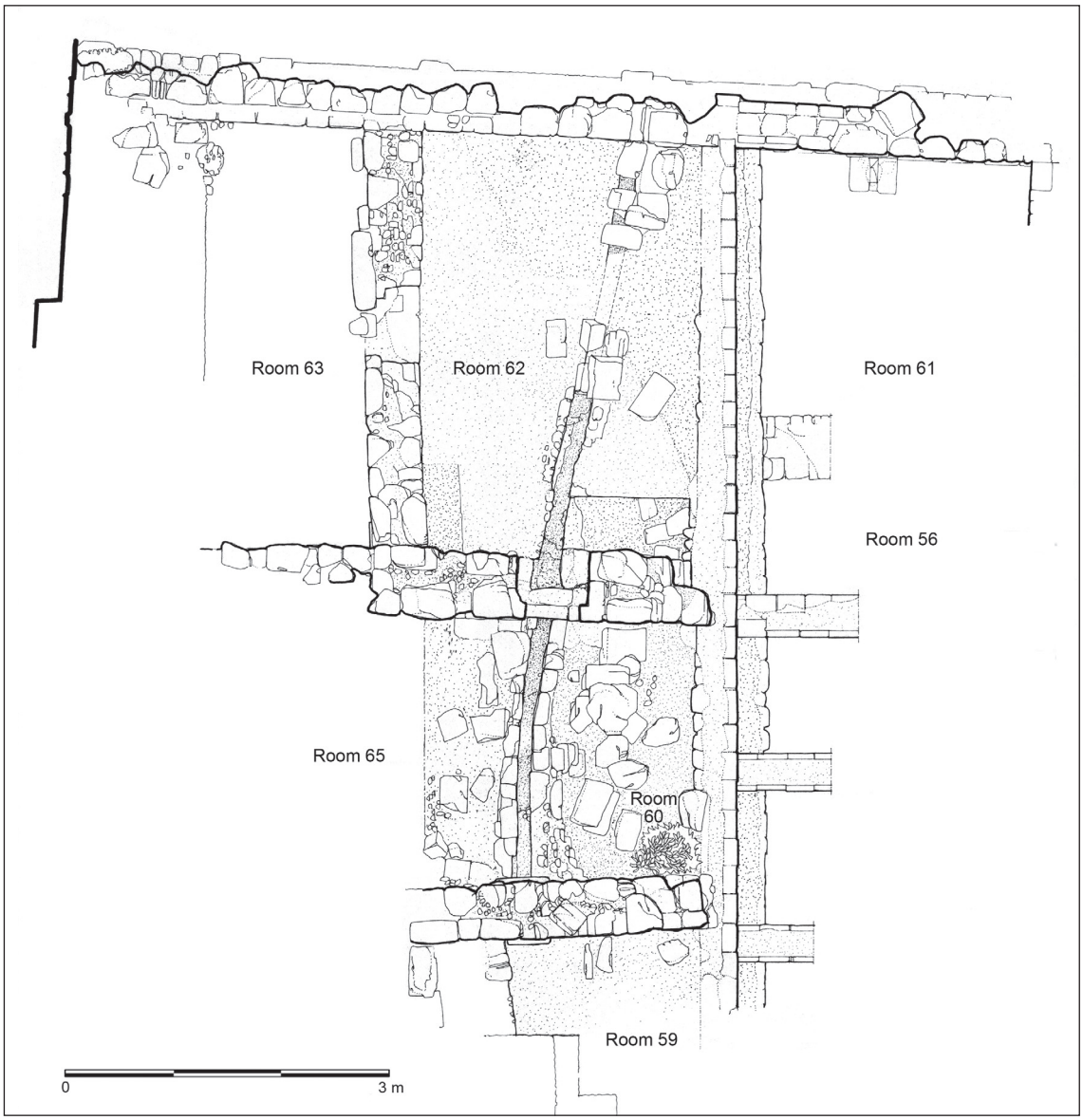

Fig. 159 Memorial of Moses. Plan of the channel in rooms nos. 60–62.

As well as providing water, the monastery of Mount Nebo also had a system for its disposal. Two drainage systems have been identified in the western sector of the monastic complex, most probably in this area to take advantage of the slope of the mountain (Fig. 157). The excavations of room no. 22, looking directly on to the atrium of the basilica, have identified a channel plastered with a good mortar with a thickness of 2–4 cm which allowed the water to flow towards the western wall of the room and from here to drain into the western courtyard of the monastery[631] (Fig. 158). Thanks to the slight slope of this open area, the water flowed towards a drainage channel which went through rooms nos. 60 and 62, finally allowing the water to flow outside the monastic complex[632] (Fig. 159). A similar system of drainage also characterized the north-western wing of the monastery where in room no. 17 a drainage channel was identified which flowed into room no. 53[633].

631 Saller 1941, 127–128; pls. 22. 161.
632 Saller 1941, 163.
633 Saller 1941, 123–124; pls. 17. 51, 2.

4.3 ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMPONENTS

4.3.1 Religious and lay euergetism

Archaeological and epigraphic records recovered in the monasteries of Mount Nebo reveal acts of religious and lay euergetism. Three categories of people contributed financially to the development of the monastery of Siyagha: pilgrims, affluent laymen and the bishops of Madaba. The presence of the first subjects is intrinsically linked with the religious devotion for the shrine of the prophet Moses[634]. As already mentioned, from the beginning of the 5th cent. A.D. pilgrims, welcomed by local monks, began to visit the Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo[635]. Religious hospitality addressed the five primary needs of the pilgrims: food, water, shelter, liturgies and guidance to the local sacred places[636]. In their turn, the monasteries benefited from the possible donations and began to produce architectonic structures adequate to meet the growing needs of the community[637]. The association between these two elements contributed to the lasting life of the monastic institutions even in the Abbasid period[638].

The other two categories of donors are also epigraphically attested in the mosaic inscriptions laid in the ecclesiastical buildings of the Nebo region. The inscriptions mention thirty-four donors and benefactors. Of these twenty-three are men (one deacon and one priest), while eleven are women[639].

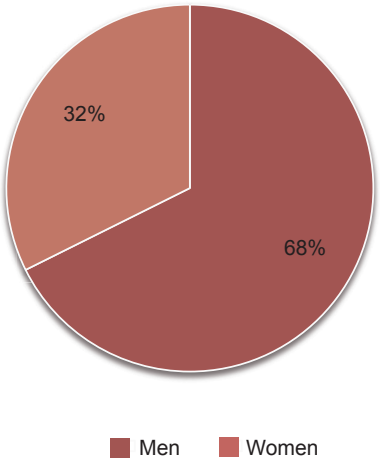

Diagram 3 Sex of the Donors in Mosaic Inscriptions

The social pattern is particularly interesting. Among the lay people mentioned in the mosaics most of the wealthy benefactors bear Greek names, while people from the lower class (including workers and local villagers) seem to have Semitic onomastics, both Aramaic and Arabic[640]. A clear example is the inscription recalling the euergetic act of Stephen and Elijah, sons of Comitissa, in the church of Saints Lot and Procopius and in the church of St George in the village of Khirbet el-Mukhayyat[641]. Regarding specific profession, the text of the mosaic in the north *diakonikon* of the basilica of Siyagha (dated to A.D. 530/531) mentions the name of three advocates (σχολαστικόι): Muselius with his wife Sergius, Philadelphus, and Gothus[642] (Fig. 160). The portraits of the euergets are well attested in the church of the Nebo region[643] (Fig. 161).

Euergetism of the bishopric of Madaba is also showed in the mosaic inscriptions of the monastic complex. Bishop Elias (A.D. 531–536) is mentioned in the mosaic inscription of the northern *diakonikon* of the basilica, Sergius I (A.D. 576–598) in the southern baptistery and

634 On the phenomenon of pilgrimage in the monasteries of Transjordan, see Chapter 3, 125–132.
635 One interesting parallel with the monasteries of Samaria was recently underlined in the study by Taxel. See Taxel 2008, 67. On the same subject Patrich 2004; Di Segni 2001, 36 and Limor 2006, 332–333. For the Egyptian area, see Bagnall 2001.
636 Taxel 2008, 67; Limor 2006, 332–333; Voltaggio 2015, 321–322; Whiting 2016.
637 A practical example of donation is provided by the legacy of a faithful to the monastery of the high priest Aaron on Jabal Haroun near Petra. See Frösén – Miettunen 2008, 12.
638 On this, see Chapter 5.
639 Di Segni 1998, 465–466.
640 Di Segni 1998, 457–458.
641 Di Segni 1998, 439–440 no. 36.
642 Di Segni 1998, 429–430 no. 6.
643 Hamarneh 1998; Habas 2009.

Fig. 160 Memorial of Moses. Mosaic floor in the north *diakonikon* (dated to A.D. 530/531).

Fig. 161 Khirbet el-Mukhayyat, Wadi ʻAfrit. Detail of the mosaic in the Chapel of the priest John (dated to 6th cent. A.D.) illustrating the faces of two donors: a priest and a matron.

Leontius (A.D. 603–608) in the chapel of Theotokos[644]. In addition to the usual honorific function, we can imagine a direct involvement of the bishop through the investment of diocesan funds for the construction works of the monastery[645].

Hegumens	Bishops of Madaba
Alexis (4th–5th cent. A.D.)	
Procapis (end 5th – beginning 6th cent.)	Fidus (end 5th – beginning 6th cent.)
Robebos (end 5th – beginning 6th cent.)	Cyrus (end 5th – beginning 6th cent.)
Elias (A.D. 530–[...])	Elias (A.D. 531–536)
Martyrius (A.D. 597–[...])	Sergius (A.D. 576–598)
Theodorus (A.D. 603–[...])	Leontius (A.D. 603–608)

The following diagram shows how a high percentage of the donations to the ecclesiastical institutions in the diocese of Madaba, attested by the term Προσφορά (offering), are concentrated precisely in the geographic area of Mount Nebo.

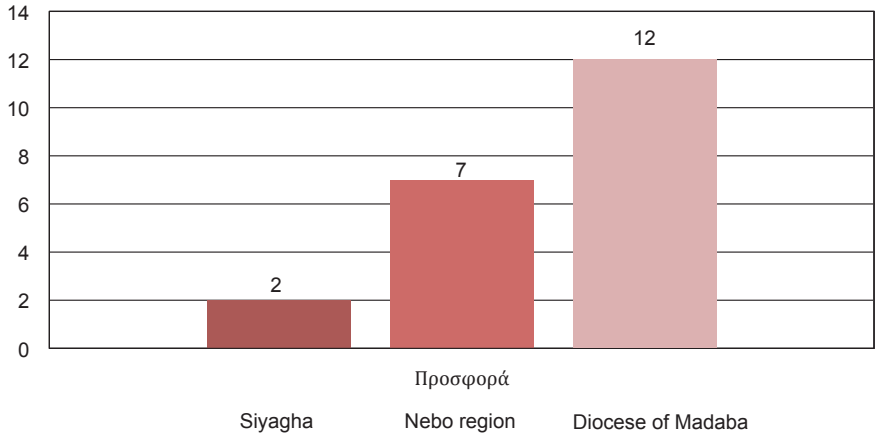

Diagram 4 Occurences of the term Προσφορά (offering) in mosaics of Siyagha, the Nebo region and the diocese of Madaba.

The donations by pilgrims and euergets and the commissioning of architectonic work mean that presumably money circulated and flowed into and out of the coffers of the monastery[646]. However, due to the lack of written documents, it is not possible to establish the monetary use of the monastic community of Nebo. During the excavations of S. Saller one hundred eighty-eight coins were found, to which are added other one hundred ninety-seven coins discovered between 1967 and 1996[647] and the coins mentioned in Chapter One. Most of the coins were found scattered in the rooms of the monastery, or in layers sealed beneath the mosaic floors. It is not possible to establish to whom the coins belonged, whether to the monks, pilgrims or workers.

644 For the relative epigraphic studies, see Di Segni 1998, 430–434.
645 On this subject, see Feissel 1989 and the more recent studies by Rapp 2000 and Rapp 2005.
646 Callegher 2016, 151.
647 Gitler 1998, 550–551.

Noteworthy is a coin hoard of two hundred and thirty copper coins (*Folles* in particular) found hidden in the wall of a cell dated to the 6th cent. A.D. and hundreds of sub-units in isolated finds[648]. B. Callegher suggests that the hoard has a value of about two gold *tremisses*[649]. He supposes that this amount could be a small reserve for the payment of a worker engaged in building work during the 6th cent. A.D., or a votive accumulation by a monk[650].

4.3.2 The social composition of the monks

No archaeological data allow us to establish the number of monks who constituted the monastic community of Mount Nebo. Although many bones have been found in the burials of the Siyagha monastery, most of them were found at the time of S. Saller and were not studied analytically with modern anthropological analyses[651]. However, burial practices could suggest the hierarchy of the monastic community. Indeed, the position of the individual tombs related to the empty tomb found along the axis of the church and the number of buried people may reflect the rank of monks. The graves containing only one individual (no. 70 and no.73) and situated under the presbytery certainly had to be destined to some hegumen or to a member of the high clergy[652]. The tombs no. 72 and no. 74, despite being polysomic, contained the remains of eight individuals, who, being buried *ad sanctos*, could also have been prominent members of the community. The tomb located under the presbytery of the monastic church of Kaianus in the Wadi ʻUyun Musa would also appear to be a privileged burial[653]. However, most of the monks were buried in polysomic tombs and later their bones were placed in collective ossuaries.

To the east of the *coenobium* of Siyagha the funerary chapel of Robebus (ca. A.D. 530) was designed for the burial of a few chosen dead[654]. Below its floor there was a large crypt. The burials were carefully studied between 2007 and 2010 by M. Judd. The crypt contained skeletons of at least seventy-three adult men, presumed to have been monks, but also included youths[655]. Careful examination revealed damage to ear bones. Although dimorphic cranial features were ambiguous in some cases, one female may have been present at Mount Nebo (skeleton 30B)[656].

The etymological analysis of the names of the clergymen found on the mosaic inscriptions of the Nebo region shows that in the 5th cent. A.D. a large number of priests bear Greek names, with the sole exception of the priest and hegumen Robebos, while during the 6th and 7th centuries the Semitic names are also attested, in equal number to those of Greek origin[657]. However, due to the predominance of Biblical names it is not possible to trace back to the ethnic background of the clerics[658].

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[648] Callegher 2012. On the other coins found in the monastery, see Gitler 1998 and Callegher 2010.

[649] Callegher also suggests that this sum corresponds to the value of a twice-monthly payment expressed in gold coins, but made with bronze sub-units. See Callegher 2012, 325.

[650] Callegher 2012, 327. Some parallels referred to the price of everyday goods in Egypt between the 4th and the 7th centuries A.D. can be inferred from the *Life of John the Almsgiver*, written by Leontius of Neapolis. See Morrisson 1989 and Hamarneh 2016, 134 note 22.

[651] Sanmorì 1998.

[652] Bianchi 2018, 42–43.

[653] Sanmorì 1998, 418.

[654] Both literary sources and archaeological and epigraphic evidence show that abbots, priests and mere monks often had separate burial. See Di Segni 1998, 437–438 no. 34, note 38.

[655] Judd *et al.* 2019, 457–458.

[656] Judd *et al.* 2019, 457.

[657] Di Segni 1998, 458.

[658] Di Segni 1998, 458.

5. FROM THE BYZANTINE PERIOD TO ISLAMIC RULE: CONTINUITY AND DECLINE OF MONASTICISM BEYOND THE RIVER JORDAN

One of the recent issues brought to scholarly attention in the last decades concerns the political and cultural transition between the Byzantine and the early Islamic era. In particular, research is focused on the linguistic, economic and social aspects, which in the course of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates resulted in changed circumstances. Monasticism therefore is very important for understanding life in the Christian communities after the Arab-Muslim conquest.

This chapter, in the light of the new archaeological data argued previously in the text, aims to look further into the last phases of monasticism in the regions beyond the River Jordan. First those elements of continuity which made the survival of the monastic estates possible after certain traumatic events (the Persian invasion of A.D. 614 and the subsequent Muslim conquest) will be analysed, followed by a reflection on a series of internal and external factors that undermined the monastic situation and which gradually led to its decline.

5.1 ELEMENTS OF CONTINUITY

5.1.1 Monastic life during the Persian occupation

The beginning of the 7th cent. A.D. represented a time marked by a series of particularly dramatic events for the provinces of *Palaestina* and *Arabia.* The first event that undermined the stability of the Byzantine rule was the Persian invasion in the spring of A.D. 614, when the Sassanid troops, moving from Damascus, penetrated through the region of Hawran in the Palestinian provinces, succeeding in conquering the city of Jerusalem before their retreat towards the North[659]. The dramatic nature of this episode, which entailed the destruction of numerous buildings of Christian worship, including the Constantinian basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, and the killing of numerous Christians in the place known as Mamilla, are related in the *Tale of the Taking of Jerusalem* by the monk Strategios of the monastery of St Saba and in the famous *Annals* by Euthymius, Patriarch of Alexandria (A.D. 877–940)[660]. The Persian occupation lasted until A.D. 630, when the Emperor Heraclius came to Jerusalem to sign the peace agreements with the Sassanid sovereign[661].

Regarding monasticism, literary sources report numerous cases of Persians looting the Palestinian monasteries. The *Epistle of Antiochus to Eustathius* shows that in the Laura of St Saba, the church was destroyed and forty-four monks were killed[662], whilst the monastery of Martyrius was emptied[663]. Because of the Persian attacks, the *Life of St George of Khoziba* recalls the hegumen and the many monks, in particular those of the Sabaite complex, who abandoned the Palestinian monasteries, seeking refuge in natural caves, while others crossed the River Jordan to flee to the territories of the province of *Arabia*[664].

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659 al-Tabari, 1, 1005. 1007; Ibn al-Athir, 1, 476. 479; Schick 1995, 20–21. See also Eut. Ann. 17, 25–26.

660 Eut. Ann. 18.

661 Schick 1992, 111; Piccirillo 2007, 95.

662 Epistola ad Eustathium, PG 89, 1421–1428; Patrich 1995, 326–328. Another case of the killing of a monk is attested in the Laura of Heptastomos in Choziba. See Patrich 1995, 110–113; Hirschfeld 2003, 189–203.

663 Magen – Talgam 1990, 91–152; Patrich 2011, 209.

664 Epistola ad Eustathium, PG 89, 1421–1428; see Schick 1992, 21; Patrich 2011, 208.

From literary sources it is possible to trace a very distinct territorial picture, but the analysis of the archaeological layers dating to the Persian period is not an easy task. Whilst some Palestinian monastic foundations had to face a first moment of political instability, the situation in the territories beyond the River Jordan should have been far calmer. This fact is confirmed by the mosaic inscriptions related to restorations carried out in the Jordanian monastic complexes during the years of the Persian occupation. Emblematic in this regard are a group of churches, in particular the one dedicated to St Nicephorus Constantine, brought to light in the village of Rihab in which the mosaic inscriptions mention building works carried out between A.D. 619 and 623[665]. Also the inscription in the monastic complex of Mar Liyas near Thisbe suggest one building phase of the church dated to A.D. 623[666]. It is noteworthy that these two archaeological sites are very close to one another and to Jerash, the seat of an important and flourishing diocesan centre[667]. However, the only two mosaic inscriptions found so far do not allow us to elaborate an archaeological pattern applicable to a regional level. Although it is possible to suggest that this region was only partially affected by the Persian occupation, above all because the armies gravitated mostly towards Jerusalem and along the Mediterranean coast in the centres of Caesarea and Gaza, the economic and social substratum of this rich diocese should also be taken into account. The restorations carried out in this region can be attributed to the high level of affluence and the relative autonomy of the Christian community in these ancient cities, as shown by recent excavations[668]. The building activities in the ecclesiastical and monastic complexes in the region would in this way be the sign of the existence of a sufficiently independent economic system in which the euergetic acts of the local donors remained active throughout the 7th cent. A.D.

The archaeological data from the monastic complexes in the central and southern area of Transjordan are far more silent, with their building phases not recording substantial levels of destruction or renovation during the years of the Persian occupation. Some important building works took place just before A.D. 614, with the hegumens of Mount Nebo engaged in building the chapel of Theotokos (A.D. 603–608)[669] and the abbot Sozomenos of the monastery of Deir ʻAin ʻAbata engaged in repaving the basilica in the month of April in A.D. 605 or 607[670].

5.1.2 The monastic foundations under Islamic rule

The rise of Islamic rule, which occurred after the battle on the River Yarmuk in A.D. 636, was perceived by the local population in a much less traumatic way[671]. As far as the religious policy is concerned, the caliph Omar explicitly prohibited acts of violence against churches and monasteries.

An emblematic testimony on the continuation of monastic life under Islamic rule is the *Life of St Stephen the Sabaite,* written in Arabic by his disciple Leontius of Damascus in approximately A.D. 807. Born in A.D. 725 in a village near Ascalon, the monk spent a good part of his life in the Laura of St Saba until A.D. 794[672]. From the pages of Leontius, we learn that the

665 Many monasteries were built in the provinces of *Arabia* and *Palaestina Secunda*, in particular in the region of Rihab, the complexes of St Sophia in A.D. 605; of Khirbat ad-Duwayr in A.D. 608, Deir et-Tantour-Khirbet al-Musmar in A.D. 622–623, Khirbet Listib and St George in Samah in A.D. 624–625 and very probably the sites of Khirbet Daria, Deir as-Sa'nah, Khirbet el-Kursi and Deir Ma'in as well. For the bibliographical indications, see Hamarneh 2012, 284, for the review of epigraphs, see Di Segni 2017, 315–316.

666 Piccirrillo 2007, 99–100.

667 On the diocesan centre and the episcopal succession, see Piccirillo 2005, 383–385. For more on the social and building aspects of Christian Jerash, see in detail Piccirillo 2002, 115–137.

668 Piccirillo 2002, 115–138; Piccirillo 2011; Walmsley 2015.

669 Di Segni 1998, 432–433 no. 11a–b.

670 Politis 2012, 401–403 no. 4.

671 Piccirillo 2002, 220–222.

672 For more on the life of Stephen the Sabaite, see the edition by Pirone 2001, 111–118.

administration of the new rulers did not make any substantial changes to the life of the monks and no specific mention appears of the obligation to pay the *kharaj*, the tax on land which the Christians, together with the annual per capita tax (*jiziah*), usually paid to the coffers of the central authority[673]. The biographer dwells on the description of some daily episodes involving the monks of the time, which confirm that the structure of monastic life was unchanged, including the erratic practice of the religious moving between the monasteries located in the valleys of the River Jordan[674]. Leontius also documents a discreet flow of pilgrims visiting the holy places, in particular those along the route from Jerusalem to the monastery on Mount Sinai[675], as well as a series of economic activities controlled by Christian merchants[676].

Another interesting element that can be inferred from the text concerns the social context from which the monks came, or from which they tried to attract new adepts. Browsing through the biographies of the figures described in the *Life of Stephen the Sabaite*, we learn how in many cases they came from the highest classes of society. An example of this is the trio of anachoretic nuns made up of a noblewoman and her daughters, heirs of archons or Roman patricians[677] or the rich doctor of Moab invited to join the tranquillity of monastic life[678]. As L. Di Segni has furthermore argued, the monastic communities were often made up of religious individuals from transregional contexts, whose mobility required adequate financial resources for travel and whose high level of education and knowledge of Greek helped communication with the high classes of society[679].

This last aspect is fundamental for the study of the monastic economy. Analysing the biography of the holy monk Stephen, we can guess how the property of the aspiring monks often flowed into the coffers of the monastery, which were exempt from taxation. Stephen himself, after the death of his uncle Zaccaria:

> «*...obeyed the precepts of the Holy Gospel and chose eternal glory, distributed everything that he had inherited to the monks and to the churches and remained without anything in his possession, except the beauty of the faith, humility and the poverty that is the source of every virtue. He accumulated and laid down all his wealth in the celestial treasures, where it is adulterated neither by ringworm nor by rust*»[680]

The information is significant if compared with another passage from the text which tells of the right of pre-emption, often exercised by the Umayyad administration on the legacies of the Christians of the region:

> «*I have heard, son, that the sovereign of this country is despotic, takes with violence and loots the properties of the population, especially of the infirm and of the pilgrims and those against whom he puts forward claims in anger. I was told that a few days ago, a pilgrim died in the home of a Christian from here, leaving many heirs who unfortunately were not present at the time of his death. The sovereign thus took the opportunity and took everything that the deceased owned*»[681]

The lack of papyrus documentation on the individual monastic complexes makes it difficult to outline what we find in the biography of the saint; it is a common opinion of scholars that the hagiographic genre was a strong instrument of conversion and promotion of a specific cult. In addition, from the 7th cent. A.D., these narrations reinforce the topic of donations to the

673 In this regard, see Piccirillo 2002, 223–224.
674 V. Steph. Sab. 17; Piccirillo 2002, 223.
675 V. Steph. Sab. 64.
676 A clear example of this is the date merchant Petrona. See V. Steph. Sab. 36; Piccirillo 2007, 108.
677 V. Steph. Sab. 50.
678 V. Steph. Sab. 39.
679 Di Segni 2001, 35.
680 V. Steph. Sab. 9. Italian trans. by B. Pirone 1991, 52. English by the author.
681 V. Steph. Sab. 64. Italian trans. by B. Pirone 1991, 52. English by the author.

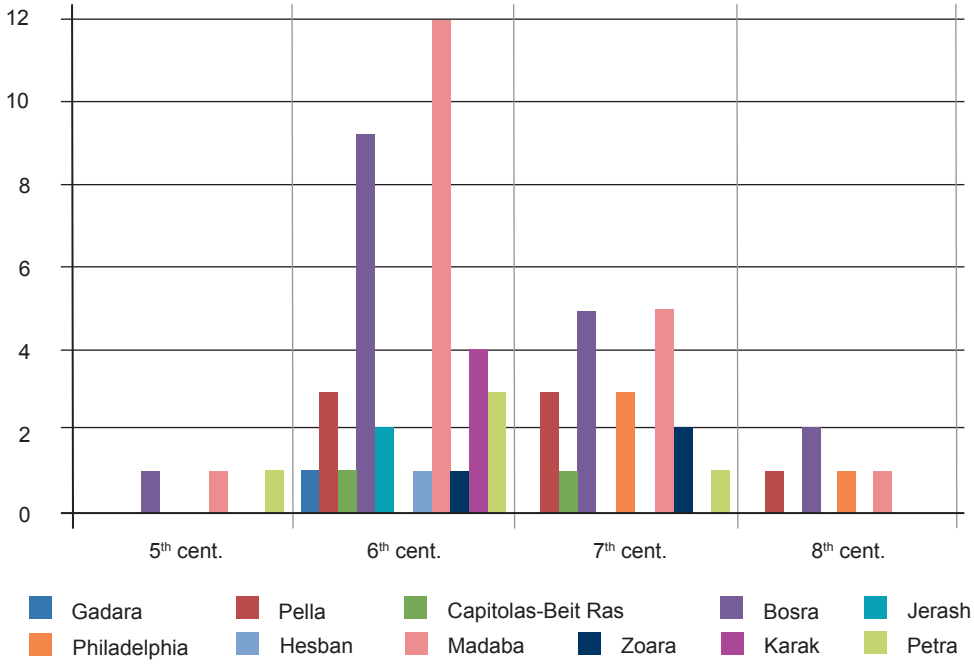

Diagram 5 The Inscriptions relative to building work in the Jordanian monastic complexes (by the author).

monastery, a necessary condition for those who wanted to join monastic life[682]. This custom certainly had to be widespread in some other Egyptian monasteries and even in the West, where, from the 6th cent. A.D., the oblations of children took on a formal recognition and rigid series of rituals described in the rule of St Benedict[683].

Going back to the archaeological evidence, we know that the system of monasteries in the dioceses of Jordan reached the apex of its diffusion in the 6th cent. A.D., while no new foundation seems to date from after the first quarter of the 7th cent. A.D. In this regard it is significant to look at the *corpus* of the inscriptions relative to the building activity carried out in the Jordanian monastic complexes[684] (Diagram 5).

The data show how the architectonic restoration in the monastic complexes beyond the River Jordan, although very common in the Byzantine period, continued even in the Islamic times. In particular, during the Caliphate of the Rashidun and the Umayyad dynasty, the attestations are concentrated mainly in the provinces of *Palaestina Secunda* and *Arabia*, in the sites of Rihab[685] Deir Ayyub[686], El-Kafr[687], Salkhad[688], Rabbah[689], and Khilda[690]. The financial resources of the

682 The topic is extensively discussed by A. Papaconstantinou through the study of Greek papyri relative to many Egyptian monasteries. Some fragments have confirmed the practice of donations: the novices of high classes contributed through the donation of arable land, the youngsters from poorer classes usually donated their work in total subservience. See Papaconstantinou 2012.

683 Regula Benedicti 59, PL 66.839a840B; for the translation De Jong 1996, 26. On this aspect, see Papaconstantinou 2012, 81–84.

684 The data are taken from the recent studies by B. Hamarneh and L. Di Segni; see Hamarneh 2012, 289–291 and Di Segni 2017, 307–316.

685 Church of St George (ca. A.D. 634–639); Church of St Isaiah (February A.D. 635); St Sergius (1 February A.D. 661); St Philimos (A.D. 662/3). For the bibliographical indications, see Di Segni 2017, 316.

686 Monastery dated 25 July A.D. 641, see Di Segni 2017, 316.

687 Church of St George, 30 April A.D. 652, see Meimaris 1992, 299 no. 513.

688 Chapel of St George, A.D. 665–666, see SEG 50, 1542.

689 A.D. 687, see SEG 53, 1883.

690 Church of St Varus A.D. 687–688, see SEG 44, 1416.

Fig. 162 Umm er-Rasas. Mosaic inscription in the floor of the southern nave of the church of St Stephen.

great monastic complexes also allowed building activity in the later decades, even though, in the light of the epigraphic contents, this was mainly limited to simple restoration works.

Specifically, the repaving of the church of the monastery of Lot in Deir ʻAin ʻAbata in A.D. 691[691]; the complete restoration of the ecclesiastical building in the village of el-Quweismeh in A.D. 717–718[692], the repaving of the monastery of Wadi ʻAin el-Kanisah in A.D. 762[693] and of the monastery of Mar Liyas in A.D. 775–776[694] as well as the important epigraphic evidence relative to a monk from the monastery of Phisga, i.e. Nebo, as one of the benefactors of the church of St Stephen in Umm er-Rasas dated to A.D. 756[695] (Fig. 162). The excavation data also show lively building activity at the monastic site of Jabal Haroun[696].

5.1.3 The continuity of the devotional practices in the monasteries

The analysis of the flows of pilgrims towards the monastic shrines located beyond the River Jordan can provide possible data regarding the effects caused by the Persian occupation and Islamic rule. This investigation therefore requires extreme prudence due mainly to the lack of specific literary sources on the subject and the difficulty of bringing material evidence to prove the flow of the faithful.

As has been argued in Chapter Three, the itineraries of the devotees to the Jordanian monastic foundations originated in the religious centres of Palestine. During the years of the Persian occupation a probable reduction in the number of the faithful occurred, due to the general political instability as well as to the destruction of the main places of Christian devotion. Whilst

691 Politis 2012, 403–409 no. 5.
692 Piccirillo 2002, 230; IGLS XXI 2, 53.
693 Di Segni 1994, 531–533.
694 Piccirillo 2007, 99–100.
695 Piccirillo 1994a, 251–252 no. 8.
696 Fiema 2016, 560–563.

hypothesizing a reduction in the arrivals of pilgrims from other regions of the empire, it is possible that devotional practices reduced to the local context were maintained.

This situation started to improve in the years A.D. 619–620 as recalled by the historian Pseudo Sebeos quoting the arrival of a group of Armenian pilgrims in Jerusalem in a letter sent to the Armenian Archbishop Komitas:

> « *"Blessed is God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Father of mercies and God of all consolations, who consoled us in his great compassion for all our afflictions" in the coming of your flock. For did he not console us in their arrival? First, by recalling to us the previous journeys which they made to the venerable sites of Jerusalem. Secondly, because he gratified our mind at their coming, and we recognized that God had not completely abandoned us…* »[697]

For a new possible line of research, a mapping of the finds of eulogies, whether moulds for Eucharistic bread or *ex-votos*, attributable scientifically to Jordanian monastic contexts, would be welcome. Unfortunately, even recent studies on these objects, very often kept in private collections and without certain excavation data have mainly concerned the iconographic elements, which has frequently conditioned their dating[698]. In this regard, an important mention of the devotional practice of oil lamps characterized by a votive function and often used by way of eulogies is necessary. These objects, as well as their well-known practical use, took on a sacred value[699]. In particular, some types of oil lamp have impressed on them the term ευλογία (eulogy) accompanied by some ritual forms of dedication to the light of Christ, to the mother of God, to St Elijah or the simple mention λυχνάριά καλά interpreted by S. Loffreda as "good oil lamp" i.e. eulogy[700]. The content of the inscriptions and their recurrence in sacred archaeological contexts has suggested to scholars that these oil lamps had a devotional function associated with specific holy places, above all in the area of Jerusalem[701].

Alongside the oil lamps of the inscribed type, it is possible to place, by shape, mixture and production technique, the so-called palm model, the resemblances of which suggest the same use and a similar diffusion[702]. Following the assumption of J. Magness and S. Loffreda, it is possible to consider this typology as a valid votive substitute of the oil lamps with inscriptions, but certainly cheaper in its production and therefore less expensive for the pilgrim who wanted to buy a devotional object in the holy place he/she visited[703].

Looking at the Jordanian context, and more specifically at Mount Nebo, it has to be recalled that during an excavation in 1994 on the north-eastern slope of the peak of Siyagha, in one of the rooms of the north-eastern wing of the monastery, under the collapse of the basilica, a fragment of a mould for oil lamps of the palmette type[704] was recovered, perfectly matching a specimen coming from room no. 56[705] (Fig. 163). The find is significant because it attests the presence of a production *in loco* for this type of oil lamp[706]. This specimen is attested particularly in the central area of Palestine and Jordan, as shown by the cases in Umm er-

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697 Pseudo Sebeos, The Armenian History 35, trans. by R. W. Thomson 1999, I, 70–71.

698 Reynolds 2015, 372.

699 For a study in detail, see Loffreda 1989, then updated in Loffreda 1995, 39–42.

700 Loffreda 1989, 223; Magness 1993, 176. On the subject see also Kennedy 1963, 89; Saller 1957, 180.

701 The first scholar who proposed this association was C. Clermont–Ganneau, acknowledging the formula "the light of Christ illuminates for all" in the liturgy of the Greek Orthodox during the ceremony of the Holy Fire in the church of the Holy Sepulchre. See in detail Magness 1993, 176–177.

702 Magness 1993, 177.

703 Magness 1993, 172; Loffreda 1995, 39–42.

704 Catalogue no. S_18716 (Archaeological Museum of Mount Nebo).

705 Catalogue no. S_10417 (Archaeological Museum of Mount Nebo). The oil lamp was found in 1987 in room no. 56, belonging to the western sector of the monastery. For the archaeological context of reference, see Alliata 1994c, 638–640.

706 Another mould for the production of oil lamps was identified in the site of Ni'ane during the campaign directed by C. Clermon-Gannaeu in 1881 and today it is in the Louvre Museum (no. 282). See Da Costa 2012, 256.

Fig. 163 Oil lamp S_10417 and relative mould S_18716.

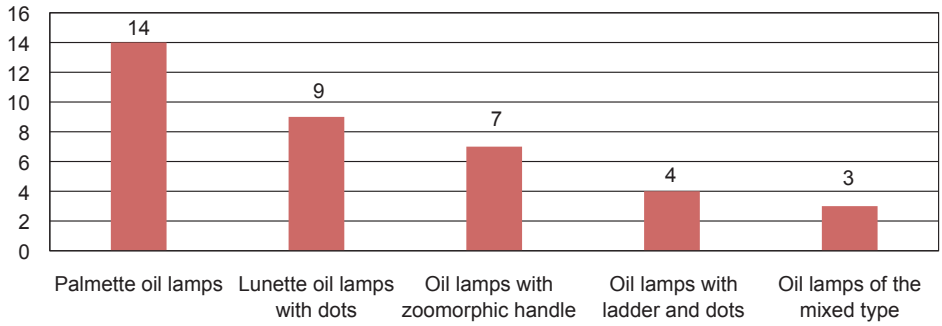

Diagram 6 Byzantine and early Islamic oil lamps found in Mount Nebo region

Rasas and in the area of Jerusalem[707]. It is therefore tempting to wonder whether the oil lamps made on Mount Nebo had a distribution that was solely limited to the monastery or whether they were made for a wider diffusion for votive purposes. The particular type of mould goes back to the late Byzantine period when perhaps the primitive eulogies, given to Egeria by the monks of the valley of ‘Uyun Musa, evolved into the practice of votive oil lamps[708].

It is not rare to find an abundance of oil lamps in the shrines of the region, as shown by the massive finds of these objects in the monastery of Deir ‘Ain ‘Abata. The excavations at this site have revealed an abundant quantity of oil lamps, one-third of which came from the grotto linked to the veneration of the patriarch Lot[709]. The samples of the oil lamps found in the area of Mount Nebo, although being much smaller than that of Deir ‘Ain ‘Abata, is particularly rich for the various types attested and the relative chronological context of reference[710].

Literary sources show that no particular restriction seems to have affected the pilgrimage at the local level after the Muslim conquest of the region. Fundamental in this regard are the accounts by religious and lay travellers[711], dated from the 8th–14th cent. A.D., interested in visiting the monasteries of the desert[712]. The picture appears very different for those who came from Western Europe; the changed political conditions made the journey, if not actually

707 Pappalardo 2007.
708 It. Eg. 11, 1–5.
709 Da Costa 2012, 266–269.
710 A joint study of the data found at the site of Umm er-Rasas and the region of Nebo is in Pappalardo 2007.
711 Reynolds 2015, 372.
712 Worthy of note is the proposal by D. M. Nicol, according to whom the Byzantines of the medieval period were more interested in visiting the places where the fathers of the desert lived, in particular in the deserts of Palestine and Egypt. See Nicol 1985, 199. More in general on the subject, see Talbot 2001, 101–102.

dangerous, definitely much more expensive for the pilgrims, with the exception of the bishops and the abbots who could have had far greater financial resources[713].

Nor should the appearance of a change in the destination of the pilgrimage, already started in the 7th cent. A.D., be forgotten. The faithful tended to reduce their visits to the memorials of the Biblical figures, preferring those to the shrines of local martyrs and the urban churches[714]. A greater closeness in time and a more immediate identification with the martyrs, especially in the case of military saints, made the Christians intensify their devotion to the relics of the local saints. An archaeological proof of this religious devotion is the abundance of reliquaries widespread under the churches' altars of the region[715], as well as the letter that Pope Gregory the Great wrote to the Bishop Marian of Jerash in A.D. 610 for the shipment of local relics to Rome[716].

[713] The accounts of pilgrimages to the shrines beyond the River Jordan are attested in the writings of the Greek monk Epiphanius (8th cent. A.D.), the English Bishop Willibald (late 8th cent. A.D.) and the Russian Abbot Daniel (12th cent. A.D.). Cf. Chapter 3, 130–132.

[714] On the subject, see Michel 2001, 88–92; Chavarría 2011, 123–153; Hamarneh 2014.

[715] Duval 1994, 185–188.

[716] Piccirillo 2004, 327–330. Many bishops promoted the worship of relics of local martyrs in the provinces of *Arabia* and *Palaestina Tertia* by intensifying the construction of martyrdom churches. On this topic see, Hamarneh 2014.

5.2 FACTORS FOR THE DECLINE OF MONASTICISM

Having ascertained that the decline of monasticism beyond the River Jordan cannot be attributed to the political-military change under Islamic rule, or to mere natural events, such as the earthquake in A.D. 749, its possible causes still remain to be discussed. To understand such a complex phenomenon, subject to archaeological research still under way, the factors outside and inside the monastic movement which may have contributed to the gradual decline of the monasteries should be analysed.

5.2.1 The external factors

5.2.1.1 The political and cultural elements

A first element of change which concerned the Christian communities in the territories beyond the River Jordan came about with the passage of rule from the Umayyad dynasty to the Abbasid one, in A.D. 750. Although not explicitly anti-Christian, the caliphs of Baghdad gradually targeted some of the privileges enjoyed by the monastic foundations. In particular, the taxations reserved for lay Christians were increased and also extended to priests and monks[717]. The jurists of the Abbasid caliphs prohibited the Christian religious from holding liturgical services aloud, using wooden knockers or sounding rattles to call the faithful to worship[718]. The use of decorating the liturgical furnishings and the lighting systems with the symbol of the cross, although it was advised against in some literary testimonies, does not seem to have been the object of a Muslim normative prohibition[719].

One sign of the change in relations between Islamic society and the Christian society could be seen in the obligation for the Christians to be recognized visually by particular clothing[720], and perhaps by the testimony of the destructions of some monasteries and churches, but limited to the Palestinian context[721]. These elements are often greatly emphasized in the literary sources and therefore require extreme prudence in the interpretation of the factors that influenced the decline of monasticism. One example come from the Byzantine historian Theophanes who in his *Chronographia* recalls with harsh tones some dramatic events that took place after the death of the caliph Haroun al-Rashid (A.D. 786–809), including the destruction of churches and monasteries in Jerusalem and in the Judean Desert (complexes of St Chariton and St Cyriacus, Theodosius, Euthymius and St Saba)[722]. However, the archaeological contexts suggest a tendency towards a form of peaceful abandonment of the monasteries as opposed to a violent destruction caused by man or by damage caused by natural events[723].

5.2.1.2 The data of sacred building

Regarding the ecclesiastical building, which also includes the churches of monastic complexes, the Arab jurist Abu Yusuf (d. A.D. 798) mention the prohibition for Christians to build churches

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717 Patrich 2011, 209. See in detail Schick 1995, 167–170 and some episodes in the life of St Stephen the Sabaite in V. Steph. Sab. 29. 55. 64.

718 See in particular the testimonies of the anonymous Syriac text *Chronicon anonymun ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, I, 307–308. For the bibliographical references, see Schick 1995, 166–167.

719 Schick 1995, 163–166.

720 Abu Yusuf, Kitab al-kharaj, 137; Schick 1995, 166–167.

721 For the monastic complexes of Palestine, we have testimonies of an attack by Saracen troops on the monastery of Theodosius in A.D. 789, with the consequent destruction of churches and the killing of monks, followed by the attacks on the monasteries of Chariton and Euthymius in A.D. 796/797 and the massacre of twenty monks in the monastery of St Saba in A.D. 797. For the bibliographical references, see Patrich 2011, 209–210.

722 Thphn. chron. 6301–6305.

723 Schick 1995, 128–129.

both in the existing centres and in the new Islamic urban settlements[724]. The topic of restoration and rebuilding of previous churches is not an easy task, as in the literary sources there is no univocal and critical vision in this regard[725]. However, as analysed in the previous paragraph, the inscriptions and pottery from numerous excavations of ecclesiastical buildings confirm the possibility of restoration in the existing complexes. Going back to the diagram 5, the restorations of the mosaics in the Abbasid period are shown by the inscriptions[726] in the church of St Stephen in Umm er-Rasas (A.D. 756)[727], in the monastery of Theotokos in the Wadi 'Ain el-Kanisah (A.D. 762)[728] together with the post-earthquake reconstruction on the peak of Siyagha[729], in the church of the complex of Mar Liyas (A.D. 776)[730], in the funeral chapel of Er-Rasif (A.D. 785)[731] and in the church of St Constantine in Rihab (A.D. 832?)[732]. In addition, there is the later activity in the monastery of Jabal Haroun near Petra[733] and the new pavement in the church of the Virgin Mary in Madaba (A.D. 767)[734].

It has to be specified that mosaic repaving, following the Muslim conquest of the region, gradually tended to be abandoned, or the number of images in the decorative motifs were reduced in preference to abstract and geometric patterns[735]. In many cases, new neutral images replaced the gaps with floral or geometric designs as shown by the cases of the church of St Stephen in Umm er-Rasas[736] (Figs. 164–165), in the monastery of 'Ain el-Kanisah[737], in the church of the Acropolis of Ma'in[738], in the church of Massuh[739], and in that of Bishop John of Zizia[740] (Figs. 166) with the intention of restoring a decorative integrity to the pavement as well as the functional one. In other examples, such as the mosaic of the church built in Madaba in A.D. 767, a geometric decoration that totally excludes figurative representations can be seen[741]. More generally, the restorations of the mosaic pavements in the Umayyad period present a smaller extension compared to the original plan of the ecclesiastical building, the sign of a possible contraction of the surface area of the place of worship[742].

In her study on the ecclesiastical buildings in the territories beyond the River Jordan A. Michel points out how a progressive, but slow abandonment of the churches in the region had already started in the Umayyad period (A.D. 660–720/725) during which about 37.8% of the one hundred and thirty-one abandoned buildings stopped being used in the urban areas and in the surrounding rural areas of the northern part of the province of *Arabia*[743]. The phenomenon underwent intensification in the last years of the caliphs of Damascus[744] and above all in the

724 Abu Yusuf, Kitab al-kharaj, 148–161. More in general Schick 1995, 161–162.
725 Schick 1995, 162–163.
726 See in detail Gatier 1992, 291–294.
727 Piccirillo 1989a, 269–293; SEG 37, 1553.
728 Di Segni 1994, 531–533.
729 See in detail in Chapter 1, 80 and Chapter 2, 100–108.
730 Di Segni 2006, 579–580 no. 2.
731 Di Segni 2017, 316.
732 Di Segni 2006, 578–579 no. 1.
733 Fiema 2016, 561–567.
734 Piccirillo 1989a, 41–49.
735 The causes that produced the phenomenon of iconophobia in the mosaic pavements in the churches of Transjordan, although considerably debated by scholars, remain to date without a convincing explanation. For an overview, see Hamarneh 2008, and, most recently Schick 2015, 132–143. For the examination of the Arabic and Byzantine sources on the phenomenon of iconophobia, see Bowersock 2006, 92–97.
736 Ognibene 2002, 320–321.
737 Ognibene 1998, 376–382.
738 Piccirillo 1993, 200–201.
739 Piccirillo 1983a, 335–346.
740 Piccirillo 2002, 364–384.
741 Piccirillo 1989a, 45–47; Hamarneh 2008, 60–61.
742 More in general, see Hamarneh 2008.
743 Michel 2011, 244, table 5.
744 Michel 2011, 247–250, table 7.

Fig. 164 Umm er-Rasas. Church of St Stephen, mosaic detail affected by iconophobic damage.

Fig. 165 Umm er-Rasas. Church of St Stephen, mosaic detail affected by iconophobic damage.

Fig. 166 Zizia. Church of Bishop John, mosaic detail affected by iconophobic damage.

early years of the Abbasid caliphate[745] while excluding the main monasteries connected with the Biblical figures. Forty-two ecclesiastical buildings show traces of being reused in the decades following their abandonment, mainly linked with a domestic function or a new religious or civil purpose[746]. For the monastic context this phenomenon occurred only in the church of Aaron on Jabal Haroun[747] and in the small monastery of Deacon Thomas at 'Uyun Musa[748].

The longevity of the monastic complexes should therefore be attributed to their specific devotional nature and by reflecting on the economic and social system that could support them. This statement finds an interesting confirmation in the analysis of the monasteries in the Palestinian context. Y. HIRSCHFELD suggests that most of the monasteries that grew up in the Judean Desert, almost 72% of the religious foundations recorded, were abandoned during the 7th cent. A.D., just after the Muslim conquest, even though the recent studies on pottery would shift the abandonment of these monasteries forward by almost one century[749]. The complexes that are linked to pilgrimage, whether they themselves are the destination of devotion or an intermediate point of call on a longer route, as well as the monastic centres which played an important role in theological education and study, appear to be excluded from this slow abandonment. Examples of this are the monasteries of Theodorus and Cyriacus (still active in the early 9th cent. A.D.)[750], of Euthymius, Kastellion, St Chariton, Choziba, Gerasimus, John the Baptist and above all St Saba which, despite the attacks in A.D. 797–809 and 813 continued to be active in the 12th cent. A.D. and even until the present day[751].

The analysis of the lay and religious patronage in the early Islamic period is crucial to understand how the variation of some economic and social dynamics can have influenced the vitality of the monasteries. Since the 7th cent. A.D. a decline in epigraphic references to lay donations occurred in the monastic complex of Mount Nebo and more generally in the churches beyond the River Jordan[752]. From this period onwards, the inscriptions mainly recall presbyters, hegumens and monks or more generally some rural communities[753]. It is possible that some changes in this system of donations took place during the Umayyad period and above all in the early Abbasid period, when the increased tax oppression on the Christian community, of which some cases are recalled in the text by Leontius of Damascus[754], could have had an effect on the affluence of the Christian communities and, by extension, on lay donations. The settlement of the Muslim population and the reduction of the administrative offices held by Christians may in some way have undermined the previous balance in the system of donations from the local structure[755]. Other monasteries, however, depending on a wider system of inter-regional and inter-diocesan economic aid, may have suffered the reduction of lay donations to a lesser extent[756].

745 Michel 2011, 250–251, table 8.
746 The phenomenon of reoccupation, although present in some cases in the Abbasid period, is mainly to be circumscribed to the Ayyubid and Mameluke epochs (in the churches of St George in Samah, of Saints Sergius and Bacchus in Umm es-Surab, the west church of Umm el-Jimal, the "cathedral" of Rihab and the church of St Sergius in Nitl. See in detail Michel 2011, 250–251.
747 Fiema 2016, 562–566.
748 Piccirillo 1990b, 244–246.
749 Hirschfeld 1999; Patrich 2011, 211.
750 Amit – Seligman – Zilberbod 2003, 139–148.
751 In particular, the monastery of St Saba. For an analysis of the complexes, see Patrich 2011 and relative bibliography.
752 On some of these epigraphs, see Hamarneh 2003, 230–241. For the bibliographical references, see Di Segni 2017.
753 Examples are the community of Khirbet es-Samra, near el-Quweismeh and Umm er-Rasas – Kastron Mefa'a. See in detail Hamarneh 2003, 232–237.
754 Cf. above 195.
755 Reynolds 2015, 367–368.
756 Reynolds 2015, 367–368.

5.2.1.3 The data on the morphology of settlements

The changes in the morphology of settlements during the early Muslim period which may have influenced the farming activities of the monastic complexes in the region also have to be taken into account. The new Umayyad ruling class gave rise to a close-knit network of large farms which grew up in the rural area, but close to important routes of communication, including an inhabited part and the land for cultivation[757]. The acquisitions of the farms started under the caliph 'Uthman (who reigned A.D. 644–656) in particular in the areas of Darum in the south of the Palestinian territory to extend to Transjordan[758]. If at first these Muslim villages and farms developed far from the Byzantine villages, probably to avoid conflicts with the Christian owners, with the turn of the 8th cent. A.D., Arabic literary sources inform us of a considerable increase in farms on the lands of the Balqa'[759]. The agricultural works were probably entrusted to workers who had converted to Islam or who had remained Christians, known as *mawali* who in virtue of a bond of servitude were linked to their Umayyad masters[760].

The reason for establishing these *qusur* in the rural areas has still not been clarified. Probably, in addition to an obvious requirement for food by the new aristocratic and military classes, there was the transfer of the urban elites to the countryside, due to the outbreak of the plague, the decline of resources in the farming areas surrounding the cities and the changed requirements of the Arab nomads who were by now fully sedentarized[761]. The territorial occupation underwent a slight fluctuation during the 8th cent. A.D., when there was an increase in the number of agricultural sites in the valleys, and a first depopulation of the places on higher land[762].

Going back to the monastic complexes, the arrival of the new rulers entailed the appearance of new subjects interested in exploiting the land and controlling the agricultural situation in Jordan. Although for the monasteries under examination no cases of expropriation are documented, the ancient monastic primacy in controlling a great deal of land changed. With the beginning of the 9th cent. A.D., the reduction of the monks together with the decrease of the Christian population, for natural causes or because they had converted to the new religion, could have compromised the lease of land owned by the monasteries and above all their cultivation, their farming production and possibly small-scale trade.

Some scholars also tend to see in the causes of the slow abandonment of these regions an intensification of the cultivation of the farming land by the Umayyad, clearly visible from the complex systems of water channels present on many estates[763], which may have contributed to a gradual desertification of the areas beyond the River Jordan[764]. Recent geomorphological studies suggest that many areas in the valley of the Dead Sea, near agricultural settlements, show a considerable degradation of the soil caused by continuous ploughing, erosion and possible increases in droughts that compromised the fertility of these areas[765].

757 Hamarneh 2010, 65.
758 Walmsley 2007, 335–336.
759 For in-depth study of the subject, see Northedge 1992, 51; Hamarneh 2010.
760 Hamarneh 2010, 65.
761 Walmsley 2007, 337.
762 Walmsley 2007, 350.
763 Walmsley 2007, 350.
764 Piccirillo 2002, 253.
765 Walmsley 2007, 350–351.

5.2.2 The internal factors

Other aspects that contributed to reducing the number of people joining monastic life and the decline of monasticism are of a demographic and spiritual nature. The hagiographic sources themselves recognize a change in the attitude to the monastic rules during the 8th cent. A.D. as Leontius of Damascus reminds us:

> «*We can now truly say that many and not a few ordeals struck the monks: the lack of virtue, hunger not for food for the body but hunger for the word of the spirit that warms and nourishes the soul, and also the decline of monastic life – who today could not recognize the penury of virtue in monks? –,the lack not only of philosophy of knowledge of action but also the lack of philosophy of the world, the disappearance of that way of meeting in which the Fathers saw one another, drawing reasons of spiritual teaching, sanctity, encouragement and zeal to do good, renouncing the demons and worldly things*»[766]

Although these words refer to a prediction made by an elderly monk of Skete, certainly emphasized by an edifying and moralizing intention, this reflection, which seems to enunciate a form of spiritual crisis towards that life of sacrifices, isolation and asceticism sought out by the first fathers of the desert is noteworthy.

An interesting testimony on the number of monks active at the beginning of the Abbasid era comes from the *Commemoratorium de Casis Dei*, a report on the churches and monasteries of the Holy Land written in Latin in A.D. 808 and sent to Charlemagne[767]. Amongst the data useful for this study, the text indicates ten monks in the monastery of John the Baptist, and thirty-five responsible for the nearby church[768]. M. L. Levy-Rubin and B. Z. Kedar postulate that the five hundred monks, mentioned by the text as belonging to the monastery of St Saba, are on the other hand to be understood as the total monastic population active in the entire Judean Desert, a figure which is greatly reduced with respect to those almost five thousand religious present during the 6th cent. A.D.[769]. As suggested by B. Bitton-Ashkelony and A. Kofsky, it is possible that during the 8th and 9th centuries A.D. the novices of the monastic communities in the region decreased, gradually becoming smaller together with an internal transfer of monks to larger monasteries[770].

No written document can provide precise demographic indications of the monasteries in Transjordan, however, the architectonic phases of the monasteries on Mount Nebo[771] and on Jabal Haroun[772] testify that the architectonic renovations after the earthquake in A.D. 749 led to a scaling down of the two complexes, reducing their extension.

Lastly, it should not be forgotten that unlike some Palestinian monasteries, especially the Laura of St Saba, none of the large monasteries beyond the River Jordan was characterized as a centre of *paideia* and erudition involved in the translations of the Greek texts into Arabic and in the training of those monks, such as John of Damascus[773] or Theodore Abu Qurra[774], who gave rise to the most important theological works of the time[775]. Although scaled down, some people of the Moabite joined the religious life also in the 8th cent. A.D. as can be seen from

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766 V. Steph. Sab. 5. Italian trans. by B. Pirone 1991, 38. 40. English by the author.

767 Only one manuscript edition of the document survives, kept at the Universitätsbibliothek of Basel. See in detail Rubin – Kedar 2001, 63–72; Patrich 2011, 212.

768 Patrich 2001, 212.

769 Rubin – Kedar 2001, n. 41.

770 Bitton-Ashkelony – Kofsky 2006a, 287–288. The complex of St Catherine in Egypt seems to have been spared from this process, as at the beginning of the 8th cent. A.D. it still had one hundred monks. See Pringle 1998, 53–54.

771 See the new excavation in room no. 103, Chapter 2, 100–108.

772 Fiema 2016, 560–563.

773 For a general picture of reference, see Nasrallah 1950.

774 Lamoreaux 2002.

775 Griffith 1992; Schick 1995, 98–99; Bitton-Ashkelony – Kofsky 2006a, 288.

the testimony of the two brothers Theodore and Theophanes[776]. Born respectively in A.D. 775 and in 778 the two Grapti monks (i.e. marked with a burning iron) were educated in the monastery of St Saba and, after the death of Harun al-Rashid, set sail for Constantinople, where, together with Michael Synkellos, they ardently opposed the iconoclast measures of the Emperor Theophilos (A.D. 813–842)[777].

[776] Schick 1995, 99–100.
[777] V. S. Theod. Grapti, PG. 116, 653–654; Schick 1995, 99–100; Piccirillo 2002, 248–252.

CONCLUSIONS

The monastic sanctuaries of the Biblical figures: architecture and devotion

The reassessment of the Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo and the other Jordanian monasteries linked to the Biblical figures results in a clarification of some issues on monasticism in the provinces of *Arabia* and *Palaestina Tertia*. The first data concerns the localization of the monasteries. As well as being linked to the sacred topography of the Biblical memorials, the coenobitic complexes stand in significant orographic positions, while in the surrounding valleys, many hermitages are often attested. This correlation indicates the strong cooperation between these two different forms of monastic life.

Although the five monasteries were located in a rural context, they were close to the Roman and Byzantine road system and were connected to the main pilgrims' itineraries. Architectonically, all the monastic complexes consist of one main ecclesiastical building, usually a church or a chapel, monastic cells, production facilities and rooms for pilgrims. From a liturgical point of view, the sanctuaries were also characterized by the presence of a physical memorial linked to particular Biblical figures that represented their devotional fulcrum. This element could be a cenotaph, as in the case of Moses and Aaron, or created with the architectonic monumentalization of special natural elements such as Lot's cave or the streams in the monastic complex of Wadi al-Kharrar.

Chronologically, the monasteries were built in the 5th–6th cent. A.D. and were active until the second half of the 8th – beginning of the 9th cent. A.D., yet in the case of the monastic complex of St Aaron, until the 13th cent. A.D.

Regarding the social and economic aspects of the monasteries, the Memorial of Moses is an important case study. The pilgrimage to this site allowed a constant flow of devotees who could have contributed to the wealth and the fame of the monastery. Larger donations by lay benefactors and diocesan bishops are attested in numerous mosaic inscriptions.

The discovery of agricultural terraces and productive facilities suggests that the cultivation of land plots and the processing of crops was highly developed in the Siyagha monastery; a common agriculture system between the individual monasteries of the Nebo region was also possible. Moreover, the peripheral monastic centres, as well as having an autonomous life, could be used as hermitages for the Lenten retreat of the hegumen of Mount Nebo or perhaps for monks from other regions of the Middle East, especially from Palestine. It is hoped that further investigations, aimed specifically at the study of agriculture, can provide new information on the production of wine and oil and better outline the type of relation these factors had with the monasteries and the nearby village of Khirbet el-Mukhayyat.

The monastic landscape of Mount Nebo: a slow epilogue

The study of the pottery found on the site of Siyagha has provided a better assessment of the phase of transition between the Byzantine era, the Umayyad and the Abbasid periods. Towards the middle of the 7th century, *terra sigillata* was no longer imported from Asia Minor, North Africa and Cyprus, but was replaced by a local production of fine tableware[778]. More specifi-

[778] Sodini 2001, 3–4; Bianchi 2007, 170.

cally for the province of *Arabia* and the diocese of Madaba, the so-called *creamy ware* should be considered the first pottery result of the Muslim period[779].

The excavations of the first two levels of the *synthronon* and of room no. 103 returned a heterogeneous *corpus* of pottery of the characteristic type with a majority of open shapes of tableware. The group belonging to cistern no. 8 is slightly different in composition, with a predominance of drinking vessels. Chronologically, it is possible to speak of homogeneous contexts in which, while finding some fragments relating to receptacles of the late Byzantine period, most of the vessels can be attributed to the period comprised between the end of the 7th and the beginning of the 9th centuries A.D. Some pottery materials of the cistern, stylistically similar to specimens found at the sites of Umm er-Rasas, Nitl, Jerash and Pella can be attributed to the height of the Abbasid period[780].

The pottery data clarify some important building work that concerned the south-eastern rooms of the monastic complex. S. SALLER had already identified two distinct levels of occupation, which had as their result a different division of the spaces in this wing of the monastery[781]. In particular, the remains of a wall in courtyard no. 83, which ran perpendicularly to the southern baptistery in a north-south direction, formed the external front of a group of rooms, which extended under the more recent ones nos. 92–102 and which were isolated from these by an accumulation of soil[782]. The whole of the southern area is characterized by an orthogonal regularity of all the rooms, which allows the supposition of a possible restoration in the same period. Although the sector seems to have retained a productive vocation, it is possible that in the previous phases this had had a greater extension, as shown by the oven found in room no. 103.

Therefore, the ceramic study shows vitality in building that was still very active in the second half of the 8th cent. A.D., which concerned both the monastery's church and some of its rooms and facilities for the water supply. This is not surprising if placed into relation with the monastery of the Theotokos in the Wadi 'Ain el-Kanisah where, as well as common pottery elements, the restoration of the mosaic in A.D. 762 provides an important *terminus post quem* which can also be extended to the summit of Siyagha[783]. The other monastic complexes in the valleys around Mount Nebo and near the village of Khirbet el-Mukhayyat seem to have undergone a very different fate. In the valleys of the 'Uyun Musa no pottery or numismatic finds in the monastery of Deacon Thomas suggests an occupation after the 8th cent. A.D., with the exception of some small and sporadic finds of Umayyad pottery, linked to the abandonment phase[784]. The monastery of Kayanos, which developed in the vicinity, stopped being inhabited in the first half of the 7th cent. A.D., as shown by the absence of the typical forms of pottery of the layers of the 8th and 9th centuries A.D.[785].

The monastery of el-Kanisah in the Wadi 'Afrit was also abandoned in the Umayyad period, probably following the fate of the village of Khirbet el-Mukhayyat, where the absence of pottery with a clear mixture, beige slip and red paint, commonly found in the region in contexts dated from the second half of the 7th cent. A.D., suggests a precocious depopulation of these areas[786].

The restoration at Siyagha and the repaving of the nave of the church in the monastery of the Theotokos in the Wadi 'Ain el-Kanisah in A.D. 762 shows the vitality of the whole network of monasteries in the early Abbasid period. The mosaic restoration of the latter monastery has two noteworthy elements of this phenomenon. The first concerns the decision to restore some

779 Walmsley 2001, 302–313.
780 Cf. Chapter 2, 113–121.
781 Saller 1941, 169.
782 Saller 1941, 169–170; table 161.
783 Piccirillo 1994b.
784 For the pottery of the site, see Alliata 1990a, 247–261.
785 Piccirillo – Alliata 1989, 205–216.
786 On the subject, see Michel 1998a, 406; Pappalardo 2007, 577–579.

Fig. 167 Monastery of Wadi ‘Ain el-Kanisah. Detail of the mosaic dated to A.D. 756 with the mention of the monk George the Recluse.

of the images to their original condition, including, in particular, the phoenix in the centre of the second row and the two birds towards the western end[787]. The element is worthy of note because, with the exclusion of the restored fish in the mosaic of the church of St Stephen in Umm er-Rasas[788], all the repaving of the contemporary ecclesiastical buildings privileged patterns with geometric and plant patterns and no longer figurative ones[789]. The second element is relative to the system of dating used in the mosaic inscription which, as in other contemporary mosaics[790], abandons the local system of the fifteen-year cycles *indictiones* in favour of a neutral system based on Christian conception of the date of the creation of the Earth[791]. The long occupation of the monastery in the Wadi ‘Ain el-Kanisah is probably connected with the special function of the complex as hermitage and refuge for stylite monks, as shown in the mosaic inscription mentioning the monk George the Recluse (Γεωργίος ἐγκλιστος) (Fig. 167)[792]. In addition, the ruins of the foundations of a tower[793] in this complex and in the monastery near the city of Umm er-Rasas (Fig. 168) show the continuity of the recluses in the Moab region, a phenomenon which had a brief renaissance in the 9th cent. A.D. in Mesopotamia, in Anatolia and in Palestine[794].

Without new and more extensive research, it is not yet possible to establish exactly when the Siyagha monastic complex was abandoned. The multiple factors dealt with in this work should certainly have influenced monastic life on Mount Nebo, taking it towards a slow decline, which forced the monks to abandon the site. The pottery fragments published by S. Saller include a diagnostic group[795], unfortunately found without a precise stratigraphic context, which

787 Schick 2015, 138–139.
788 Piccirillo 1993, 239 fig. 385.
789 Schick 2015, 140.
790 In particular in the churches of St Stephen in Umm er-Rasas (A.D. 756); of Ramot, near Jerusalem (A.D. 762); in the church of the Virgin Mary in Madaba (A.D. 767); in the church of Khirbet el-Shubeika in Western Galilee (A.D. 785/786 or 801/802). See Piccirillo – Alliata 1994, 136–138; Arav – Di Segni – Kloner 1990 and Shick 2015, 140.
791 On this subject in detail, see Di Segni 2006.
792 The inscription is dated to A.D. 762. In this topic, see Di Segni 1998, 449–450 no. 56.
793 Piccirillo 1998b, 216–217.
794 Foran 2005, 68.
795 Saller 1941, pl. 154 nos. 4–7.

refers to the so-called "pilgrim's flasks", the containers used by travellers from Syria to Iran in the 12th-14th centuries A.D.[796] The exclusivity of the find does not allow a stable human presence at Siyagha to be postulated, but probably only indicates sporadic visits that some figures made, with a detour of the usual travel itinerary. One example is given by Magister Thietmar, who mentioned the site during his exploration of the territories beyond the River Jordan in the post-Crusade period:

> «*From here I came to Mount Abarim on which Moses died and was buried by the Lord; and no man can ever know the location of his tomb, whence this: 'And he did not give to any man to explore the tomb.' Whence the Lord said to him, 'Ascend and contemplate the land; you shall see it but not enter it. This mountain is high and located in a plain. On the summit of the mountain is a beautiful monastery inhabited by Greek Christians, where I also spent the night. Around this mountain the children of Israel stayed for a while. In its neighbourhood is Mount Nebo, Mount Pisgah (Phasga) and Mount Peor (Phagor); and they are in the land of the Moabites and Midian.*»[797]

Although the text mentions a monastery inhabited by Orthodox monks on Mount Abarim, the location of this complex remains uncertain[798]. In all probability, the monastic complex of Mount Nebo has to be understood as abandoned before the period of the Crusades. The situation found on Jabal Haroun was very different, where Thietmar, referring to the monastery of Aaron, mentioned the presence of a church and of two Orthodox monks[799]. However, as J. Frösén and P. Miettunen have argued, the information reported by Thietmar could not be related to a visit to the place by him in person, but was probably simply suggested by previous travel chronicles or by some figure the traveller had met[800]. In his study on the monastery of Jabal Haroun, Z. T. Fiema suggests that, although scaled down, it is possible to ascertain the continuity of life in the monastic complex of Aaron even in the period after the Crusades and, above all, that no traumatic event led to the violent destruction of the site[801]. The scholar posits that the end of the Christian monastic community in the monastery of Jabal Haroun, which probably took place between A.D. 1271 and 1276, was: «*conscious, intentional and perhaps voluntary*»[802].

The late abandonment of the shrine of Aaron, with respect to the complex of Mount Nebo, can perhaps be attributed to the inclusion in the southern region of Transjordan into the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, a historical event which guaranteed a longer Christian control over these areas, but which with the first withdrawals of the Crusader soldiers entailed a gradual move by the Christians towards the coast[803].

The veneration for the brothers Moses and Aaron, ultimately, also became part of the Muslim credo, which dedicated shrines (*weli*) of their own to them. For Aaron, the sultan an-Nasr Muhammad decided to build a cenotaph on the peak of Jabal Haroun in A.D. 1338–1139, whilst the devotion of Moses had a different fate[804]. In A.D. 1269, the Mameluke sultan Baybars

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796 More in detail on this type of pottery, see Milwright 2009; Stern 2014, 80; Mulder 2014, 162–174.

797 Mag. Thiet. Iter ad Terram Sanctam, 13. "*Hic veni ad montem Abarim, in quo Moyses mortuus est et a Domino sepultus, cuius sepulchrum nullus hominum umquam scire potuit. Unde illud: 'Nec cuiquam hominum dedit indagare sepulchrum.' Ubi Dominus dixit ei: 'Ascende et contemplare terram, videbis eam et non intrabis.' Hic mons excelsus est et in plano positus. In summitate istius montis est pulchrum cenobium a Christianis Grecis inhabitatum, ubi eciam pernoctavi. Circa hunc montem filii Israel multam moram fecerunt. Hic in vicino est mons Nebo, mons Phasga, mons Phagor; et sunt in terra Moabitarum et Madia.*" trans. by Pringle, 119.

798 D. Pringle suggests that the aforementioned monastery lay somewhere in the vicinity of Madaba and Mount Nebo. See Pringle 2012, 119, note 177.

799 De Sandoli 1983, 270–273.

800 Frösén – Miettunen 2008, 14; Fiema 2016, 566.

801 Fiema 2016, 566.

802 Fiema 2016, 566.

803 For the archaeological researchs on Medieval Petra, see Vannini – Vanni Desideri 1995; Schick 1997, 79–80; Vannini – Tonghini 1997; Vannini 2007; Vannini – Nucciotti 2009; Vannini – Nucciotti 2012; Fiema 2016, 566.

804 Walmsley 2001, 534.

Fig. 168 Umm er-Rasas. Tower known as “of the stylite”.

al-‘Ala’i al-Bunduqdari built a shrine near the city of Jericho, in Palestine, as part of a wider general policy aimed at ennobling the Biblical prophets and the companions of Muhammad[805]. Maintaining the complex of Nabi Musa and its endowment (*waqf*) was thus guaranteed from expropriation of the ecclesiastical property that belonged to the precious Latin church of Jericho.

[805] Frenkel 1997, 237–248; 246.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das Forschungsziel dieses Buches ist einerseits die Neubewertung der früheren Interpretationen der Entwicklung der Memorialkirche für Moses auf dem Berg Nebo in Jordanien und andererseits eine umfassendere Untersuchung des Klosters, die seine religiösen, wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Merkmale hervorhebt. Diese grundlegende Analyse war aufgrund neuer archäologischer Untersuchungen möglich, die vom Studium Biblicum Franciscanum gefördert wurden und an denen der Autor mitarbeitete.

Das Buch ist in zwei Teile gegliedert. Die ersten beiden Kapitel widmen sich den letzten Entdeckungen sowie der Neubewertung zuvor veröffentlichter Daten. Dies wurde gemacht, um einen neuen Ansatz für die Identifizierung des ältesten Gebäudes auf dem Berg Nebo vorzuschlagen. Die Forschung wurde in den Teilen der Basilika durchgeführt, die noch nie archäologisch untersucht worden waren. Die bedeutendste Entdeckung, die im Buch analytisch dargestellt wird, ist eine völlig intakte Grabstätte, die bei Ausgrabungen im Mittelschiff der Kirche freigelegt wurde. Die Grabstelle wurde auf dem höchsten Punkt des Berges angelegt und mit Alabastermarmor ausgeschmückt. Das Grab wurde im ältesten heiligen Gebäude auf dem Berg Nebo errichtet, an einem Ort, an dem nach biblischer Tradition sich der Tod Moses ereignete und an dem dessen gedacht wurde. Die Analyse der Stratigraphie und der Wände der Kirche sowie der Keramiken und Funde, die während der Ausgrabung gefunden wurden, ermöglichte es, die einzelnen Bauphasen der Kirche von ihrer Gründung bis zu ihrer Aufgabe zu definieren und als dreidimensionale Rekonstruktionen zu präsentieren.

Ein zweiter Aspekt der Forschung betraf die letzten Stadien des Klosterlebens. Durch die Untersuchung und Datierung der gefundenen Keramiken im Südflügel des Komplexes und in der Atriumzisterne konnte bestätigt werden, dass das Kloster bis zum Beginn des 9. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. noch in Gebrauch war. Die Ausgrabungen im Raum Nr. 103 des Klosters sowie unter dem Synthronon lieferten Daten zur letzten Renovierung der Kirche, die während des Übergangs zwischen der Umayyaden-Zeit und der frühen Abbasiden-Ära stattfand.

Der historische und topographische Kontext des Klosters wird im zweiten Teil diskutiert. Das Kloster auf dem Berg Nebo war tatsächlich Teil mehrerer Klosteranlagen, die der Verehrung der jenseits des Jordans verbreiteten biblischen Personen verbunden waren. Aus diesem Grund wurden die anderen Klosterheiligtümer anhand literarischer Quellen und archäologischer Daten analysiert, um die Ähnlichkeiten mit der Memorialkirche für Moses hervorzuheben.

Nach der Diskussion dieses wichtigen Kontextes untersuchte der Autor die weiteren Aspekte in der Entwicklung des Klosters, insbesondere auf wirtschaftlichem Gebiet. So belegen die qualitätvollen Mosaikfußböden den Euergetismus von Äbten, Laienspendern sowie örtlichen Bischöfen. Landwirtschaftliche Einrichtungen weisen auf die hegemoniale Rolle und zentralörtliche Funktion des Klosters für die Mönchskolonien hin, die in den umliegenden Tälern angesiedelt waren.

Das letzte Kapitel ist der Analyse der historischen, sozialen und religiösen Faktoren gewidmet, die dazu beigetragen haben, dass Klosterheiligtümer jenseits des Jordans im weiteren Kontext der kirchlichen Gebäude der Provinz Arabien schrittweise aufgegeben wurden.

SOMMARIO

Gli obiettivi di questo libro sono la nuova interpretazione delle fasi costruttive della basilica commemorativa per Mosè sul Monte Nebo in Giordania e lo studio approfondito del suo monastero, volto ad evidenziarne le caratteristiche religiose, economiche e sociali. Questa analisi è stata possibile grazie alle nuove ricerche archeologiche promosse dallo Studium Biblicum Franciscanum e alle quali l'autore ha collaborato.

Il libro è diviso in due parti. I primi due capitoli sono dedicati alle scoperte recenti e al riesame dei dati precedentemente pubblicati. La ricerca è stata condotta in quelle parti della basilica non ancora archeologicamente indagate. La scoperta più significativa, analiticamente presentata nel capitolo uno, è una tomba del tutto inviolata, che è stata individuata durante gli scavi nella navata centrale della chiesa. La struttura funeraria, sita sulla sommità della montagna e decorata con marmi alabastrini di reimpiego, venne realizzata nel più antico edificio ecclesiastico eretto sul Monte Nebo, il luogo dove, secondo la tradizione biblica, si commemorava la morte di Mosè. L'analisi della stratigrafia, delle strutture murarie, della ceramica e dei reperti rinvenuti durante gli scavi hanno permesso di definire le singole fasi costruttive della chiesa, dalla sua fondazione al suo abbandono e di presentarle con ricostruzioni tridimensionali.

Il secondo focus della ricerca archeologica ha riguardato le ultime fasi di vita della comunità monastica. L'esame e la datazione delle ceramiche rinvenute nell'ala sud del monastero e nella cisterna dell'atrio della basilica hanno confermato che il complesso religioso rimase in uso fino all'inizio del IX secolo d.C. Gli scavi nell'ambiente n.103 del monastero e sotto il *synthronon* hanno fornito dati sull'ultimo rinnovamento della chiesa, avvenuto durante la transizione tra il periodo omayyade e l'inizio dell'era abbaside.

Il contesto storico e topografico del monastero è discusso nella seconda parte. Il cenobio sul Monte Nebo faceva parte di una serie di complessi monastici associati alla venerazione delle figure bibliche diffusi in tutta la Giordania. Per questo motivo, gli altri santuari monastici sono stati analizzati sulla base delle fonti letterarie e dei dati archeologici al fine di evidenziare le loro similitudini con il Memoriale di Mosè.

Dopo aver discusso di questo importante aspetto devozionale, l'autore ha esaminato la vita quotidiana nel monastero, in particolare in campo economico e sociale. I pavimenti musivi di alta qualità attestano l'evergetismo di egumeni, donatori laici e vescovi locali. Le strutture agricole indicano il ruolo egemonico e la funzione centrale del monastero sulle colonie di monaci che si trovavano nelle valli circostanti.

Il capitolo finale è dedicato all'analisi dei fattori storici, sociali e religiosi che hanno contribuito al graduale abbandono dei santuari oltre il Giordano nel più ampio contesto degli edifici ecclesiastici della provincia *Arabia*.

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ABBREVIATIONS

In addition to the abbreviations listed in the guidelines of the DAI, the following are used:

Ant: Rivista Antonianum
CCSL: Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CSCO: Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalorum
GCS: Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller
IGLS: Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie
JESHO: Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient
MNDPV: Mitteilungen und Nachrichten des deutschen Palästina-Vereins
PEFQSt: Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement
PG: Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca (J.P. Migne)
PL: Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina (J.P. Migne)
Qedem: Monographs of the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem
SC: Sources Chrétiennes
SHAJ: Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan, Department of Antiquities
TS: La Terra Santa

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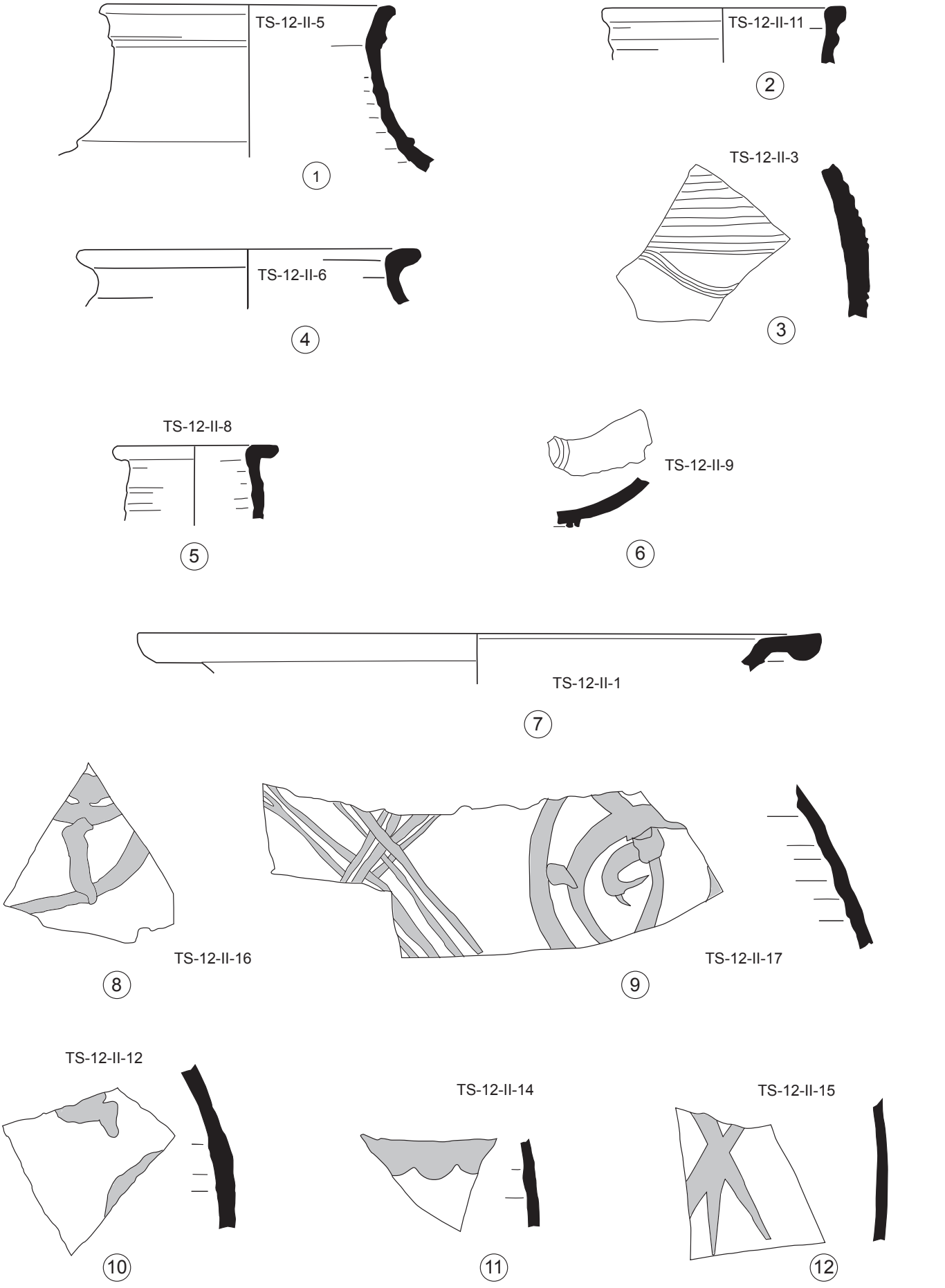
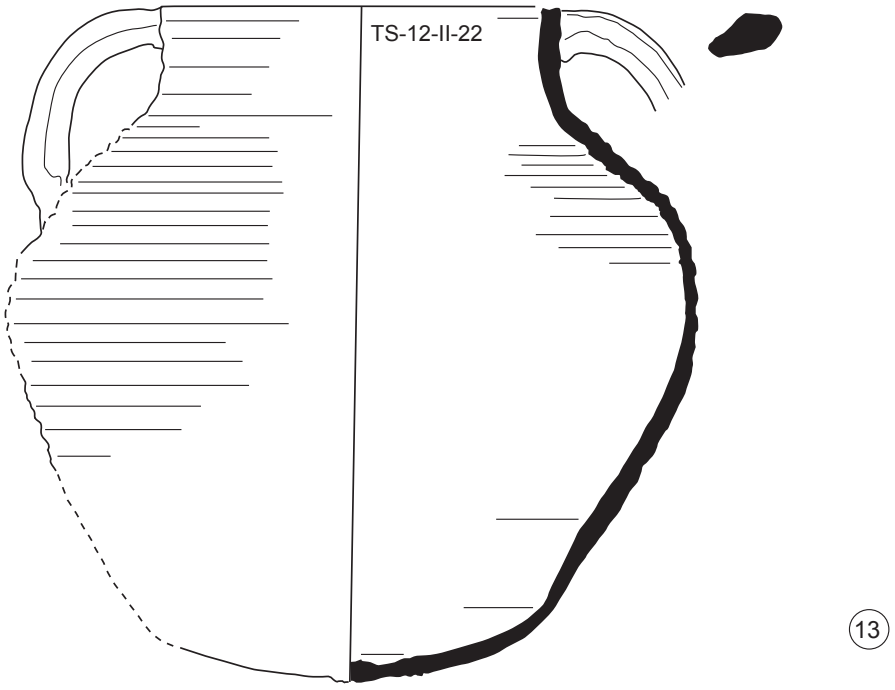
Pl. 28. Room no. 103. SU.M1039.
Pl. 29. Cistern no. 8. SU100.
Pl. 30. Cistern no. 8. SU100.
Pl. 31. Cistern no. 8. SU300.
Pl. 32. Cistern no. 8. SU300.
Pl. 33. Cistern no. 8. SU301.
Pl. 34. Cistern no. 8. SU301.
Pl. 35. Cistern no. 8. SU302.
Pl. 36. Cistern no. 8. SU302.
Pl. 37. Cistern no. 8. SU303.
Pl. 38. Cistern no. 8. SU303.
Pl. 39. Cistern no. 8. SU400.
Pl. 40. Cistern no. 8. SU400.
Pl. 41. Cistern no. 8. SU400.
Pl. 42. Cistern no. 8. SU401.
Pl. 43. Cistern no. 8. SU402.
Pl. 44. Cistern no. 8. SU402.
Pl. 45. Coins.
Pl. 46. Coins.
Pl. 47. General plan of the excavation in the Basilica (drawing by author). Cross-section of the Basilica (drawing by E. ALLIATA).

Plates

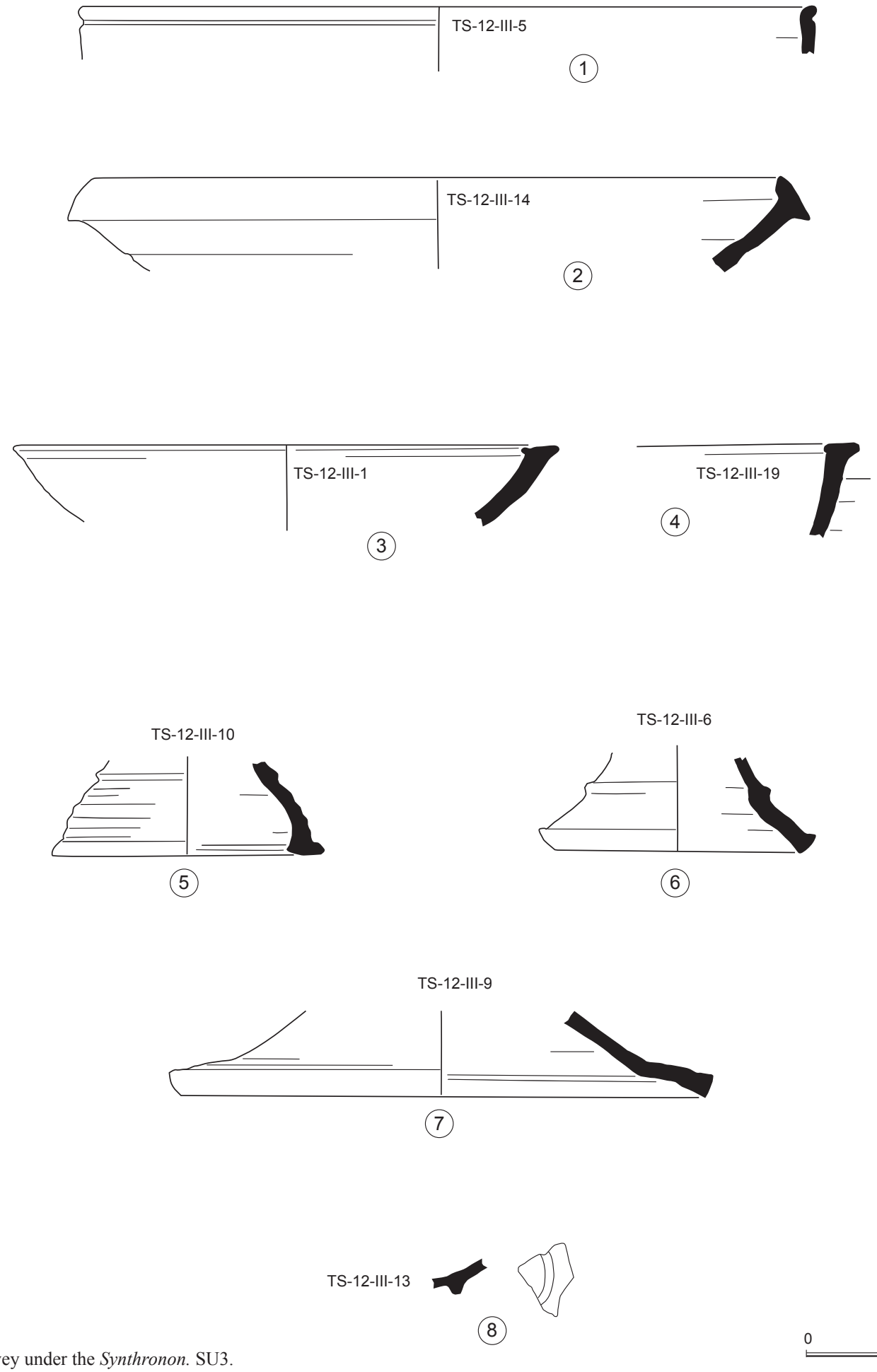


Survey under the *Synthronon.* SU2.

Plate 2

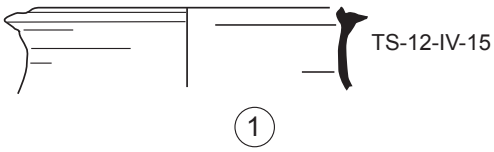


Survey under the *Synthronon*. SU2.



Survey under the *Synthronon.* SU3.

Plate 4



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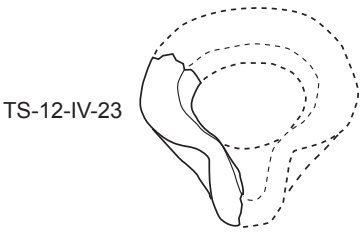

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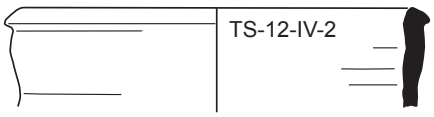

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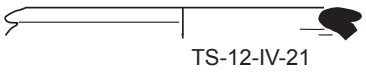

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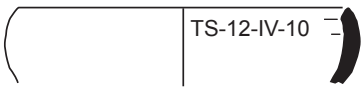

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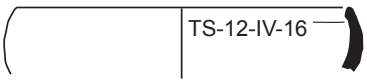

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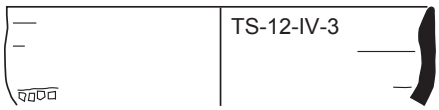

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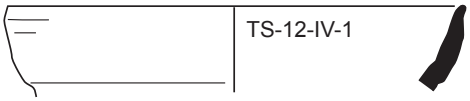

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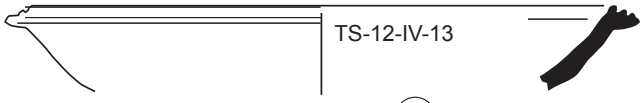

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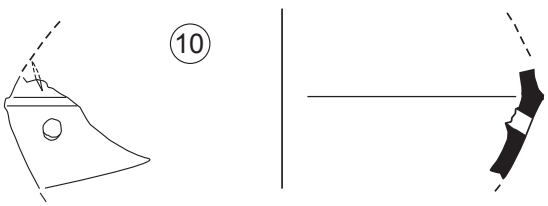

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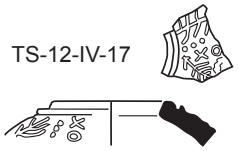

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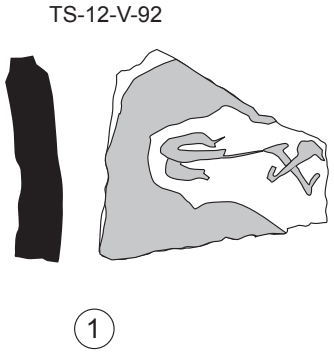
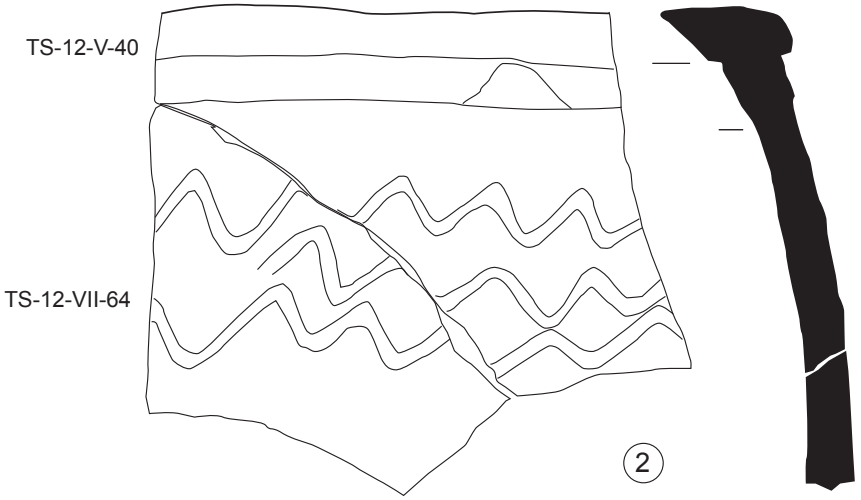
Survey under the *Synthronon*. SU4.

0 5 cm

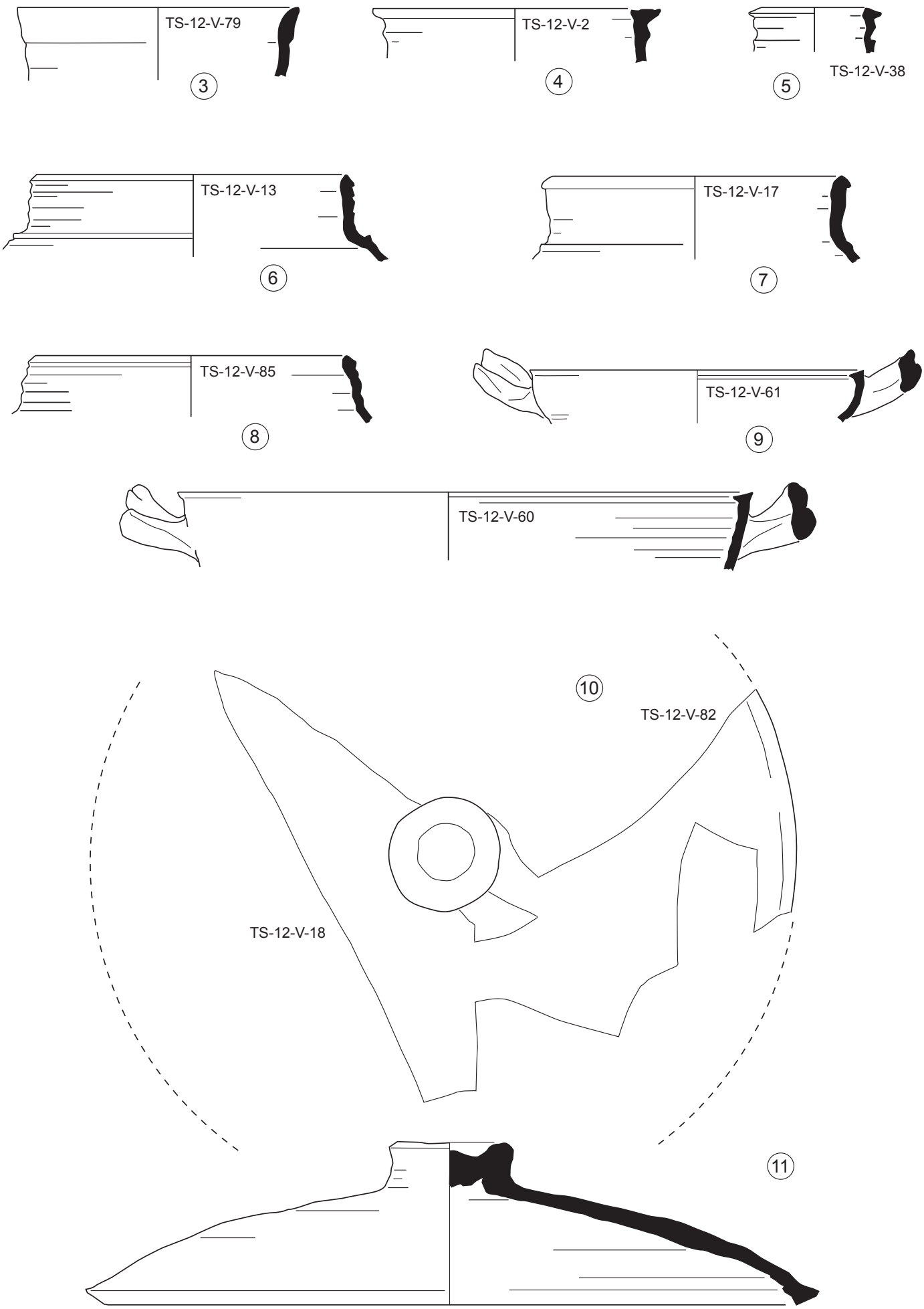




Survey under the *Synthronon*. SU5.

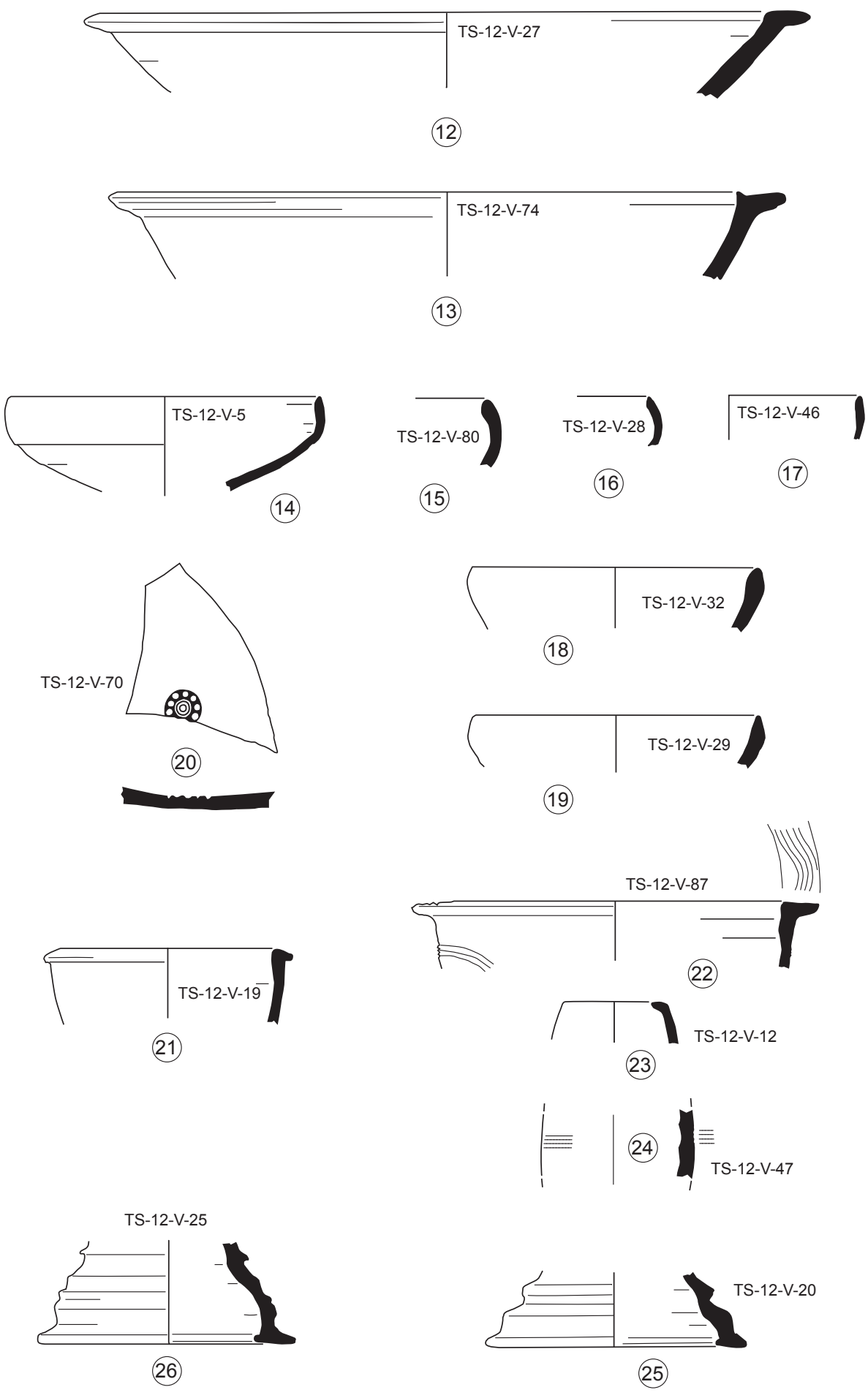
0 5 cm

Plate 6



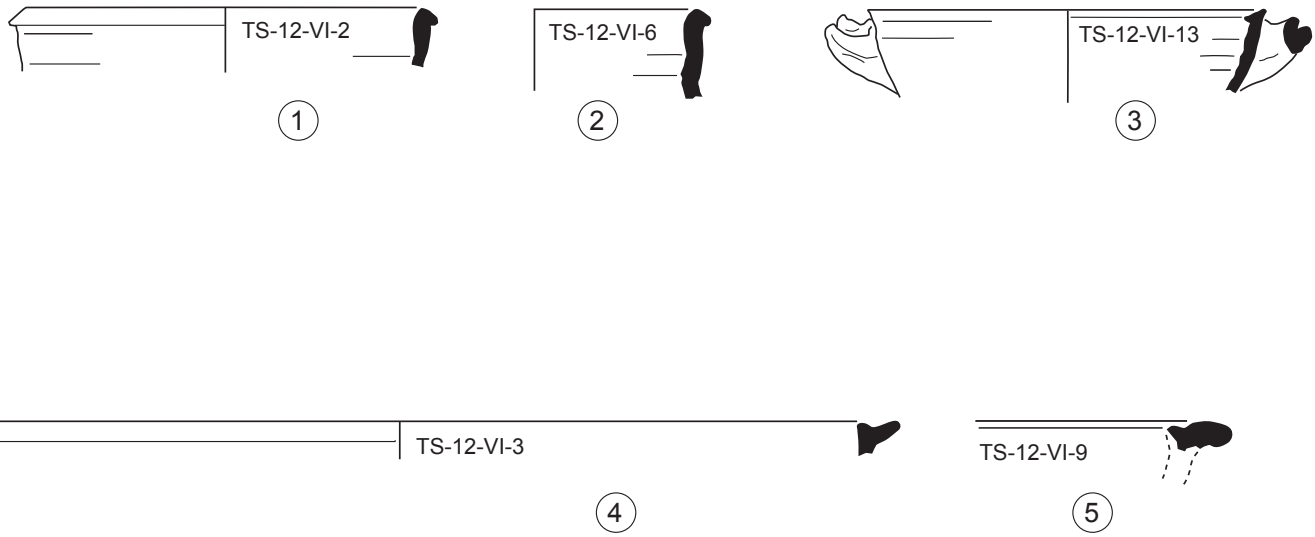
Survey under the *Synthronon*. SU5.

0 5 cm



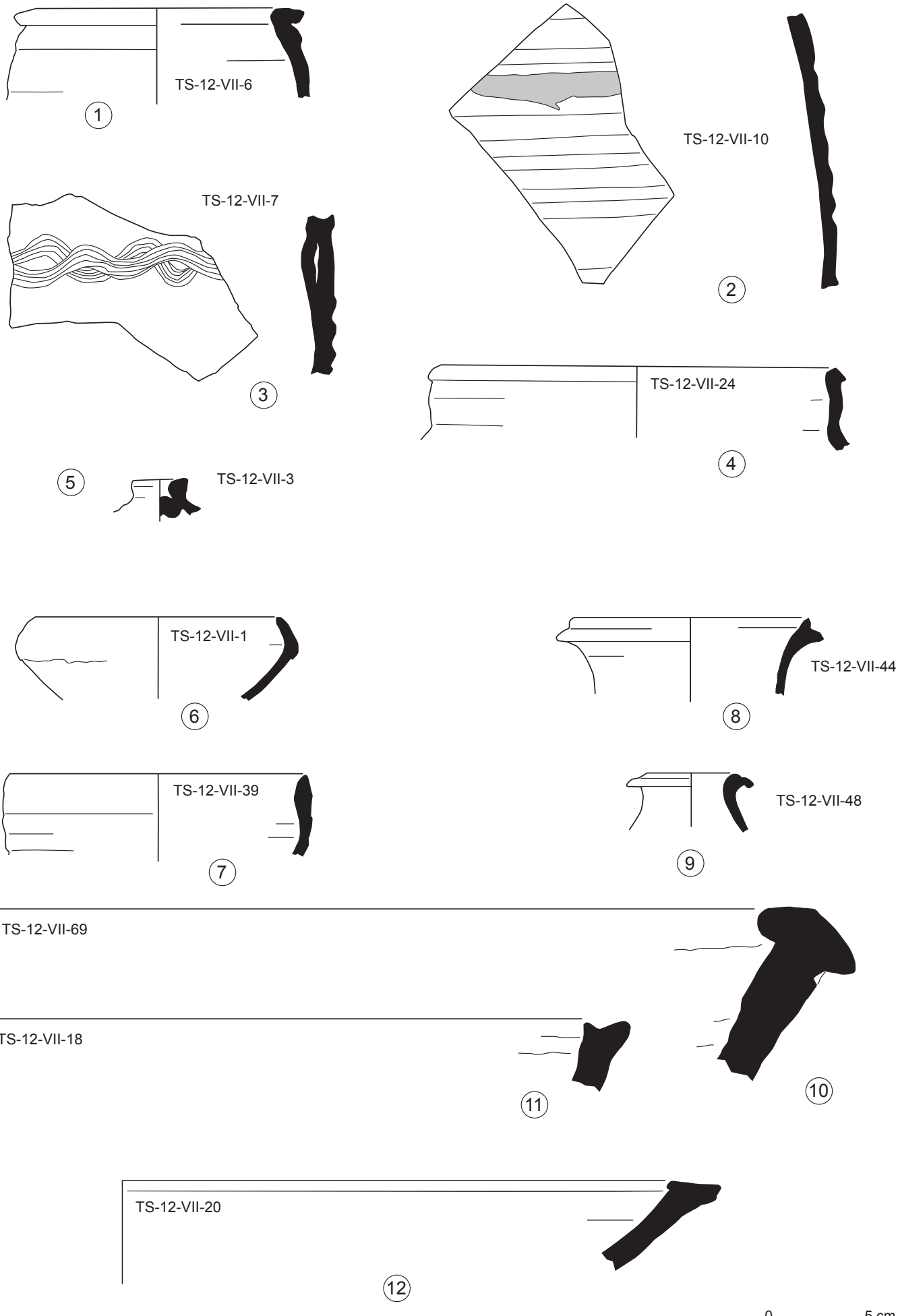
Survey under the *Synthronon*. SU5.

Plate 8



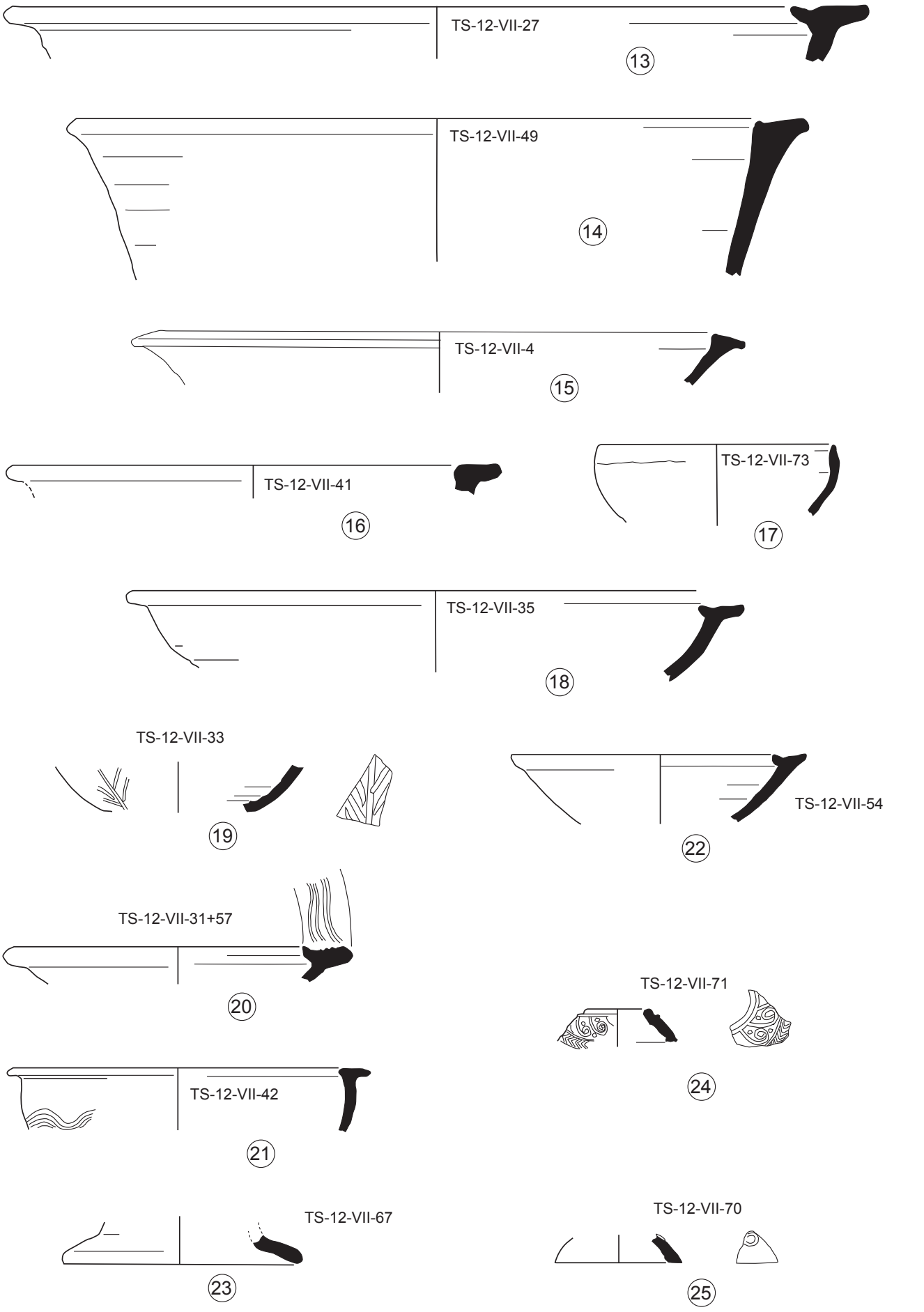
Survey under the *Synthronon*. SU6.

0 5 cm

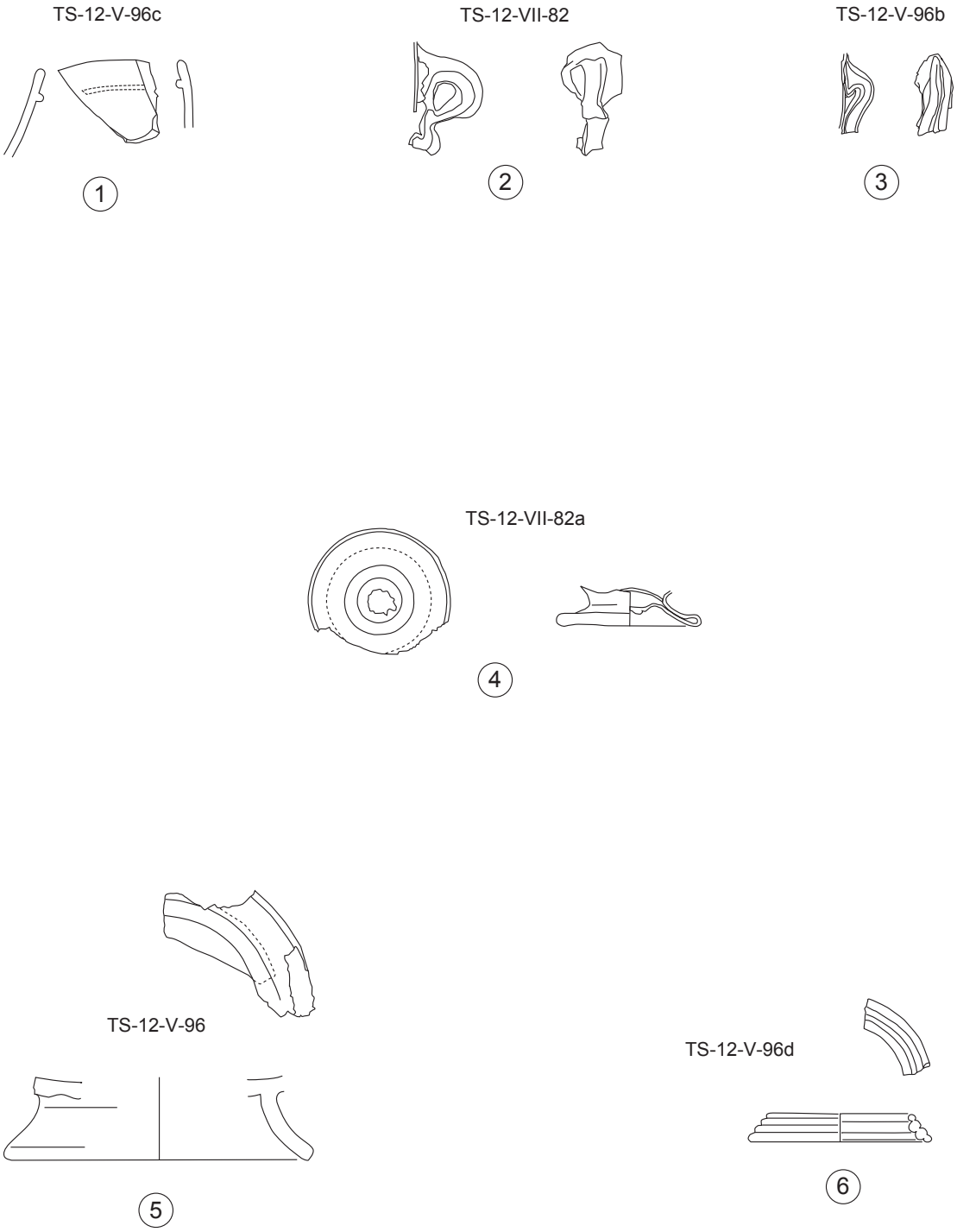


Survey under the *Synthronon*. SU7.

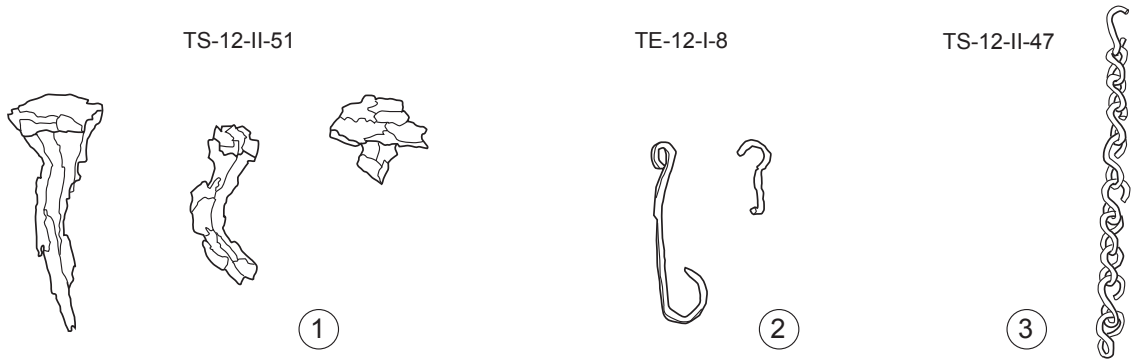
Plate 10

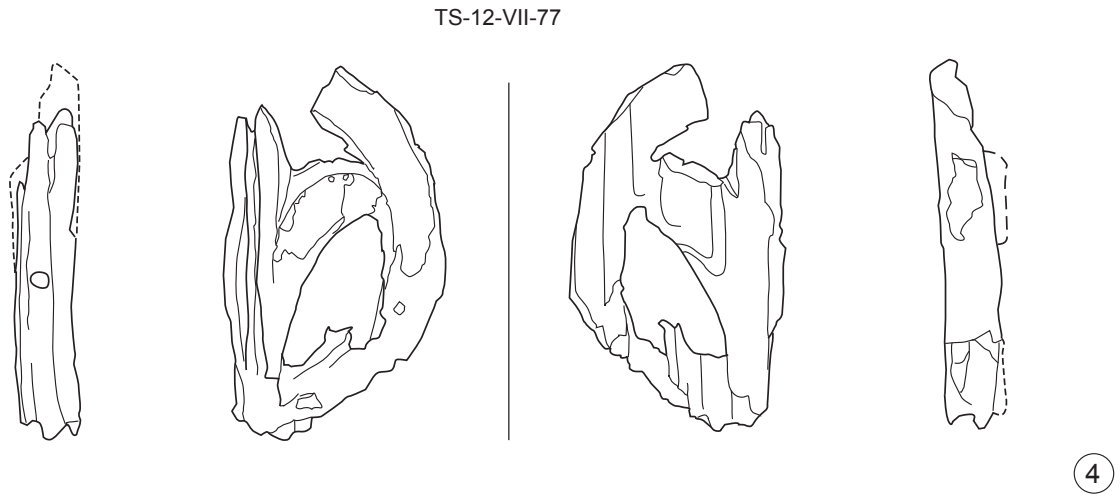


Survey under the *Synthronon*. SU7.



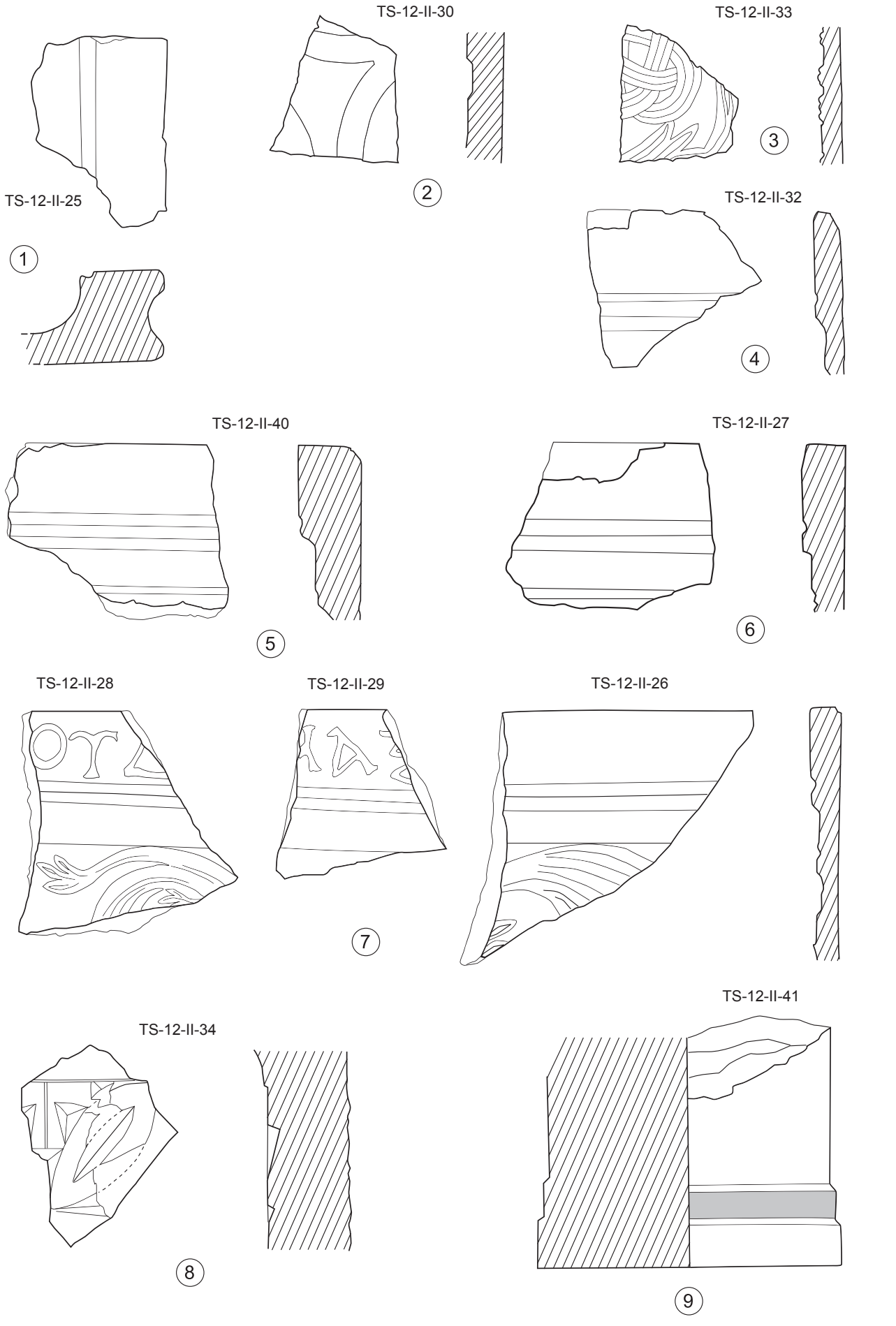
Survey under the *Synthronon*. Glass finds.





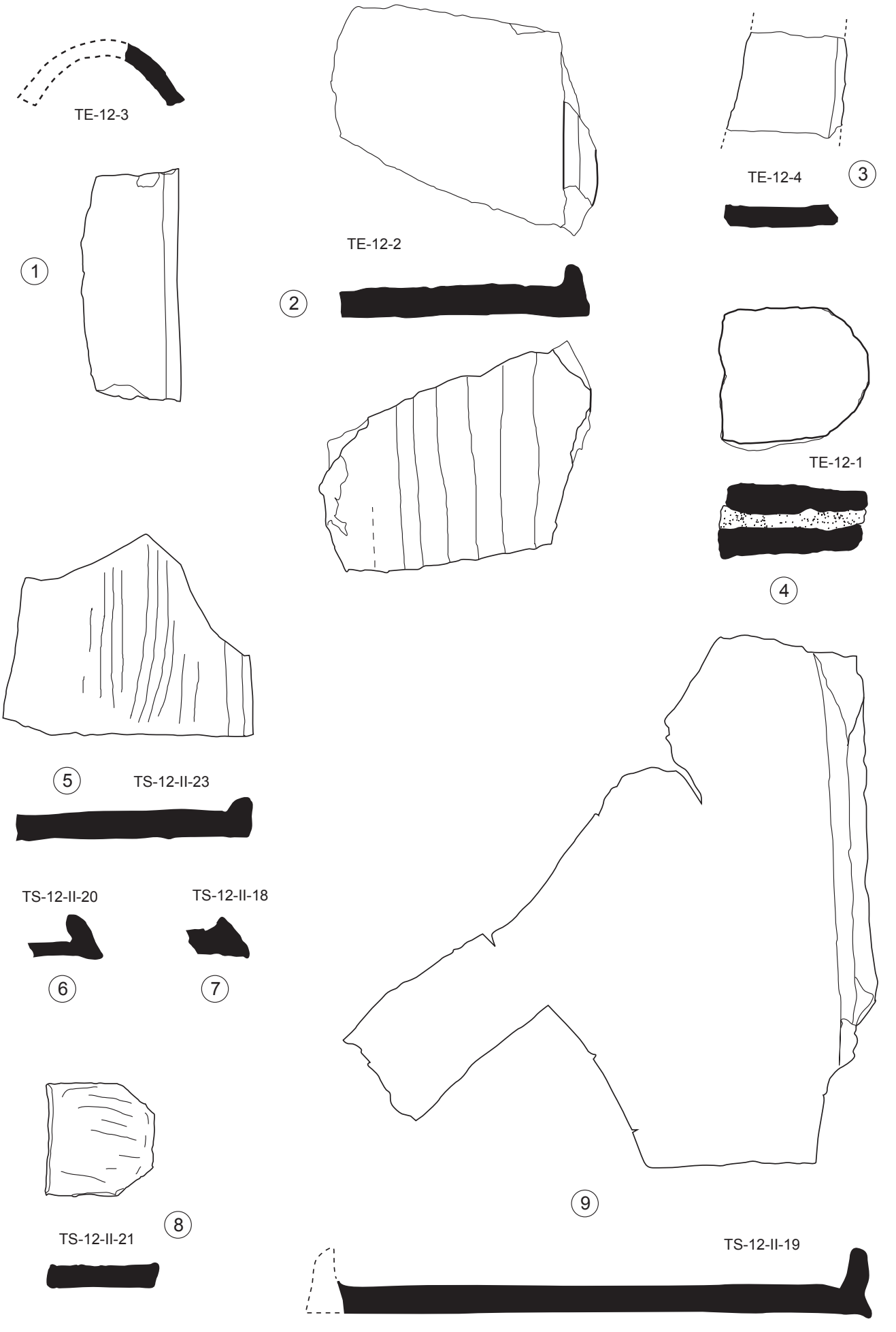
Survey under the *Synthronon*. Iron and wood finds.

0 5 cm

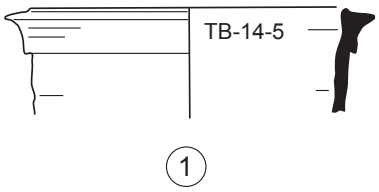


Survey under the *Synthronon*. Elements of liturgical furnishing.

Plate 14



Survey under the *Synthronon* and west of tomb no. 70. Tiles and Bricks.



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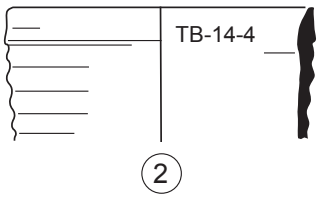

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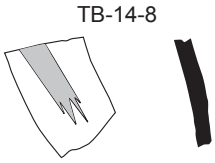

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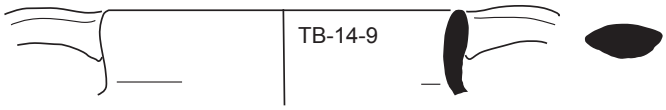


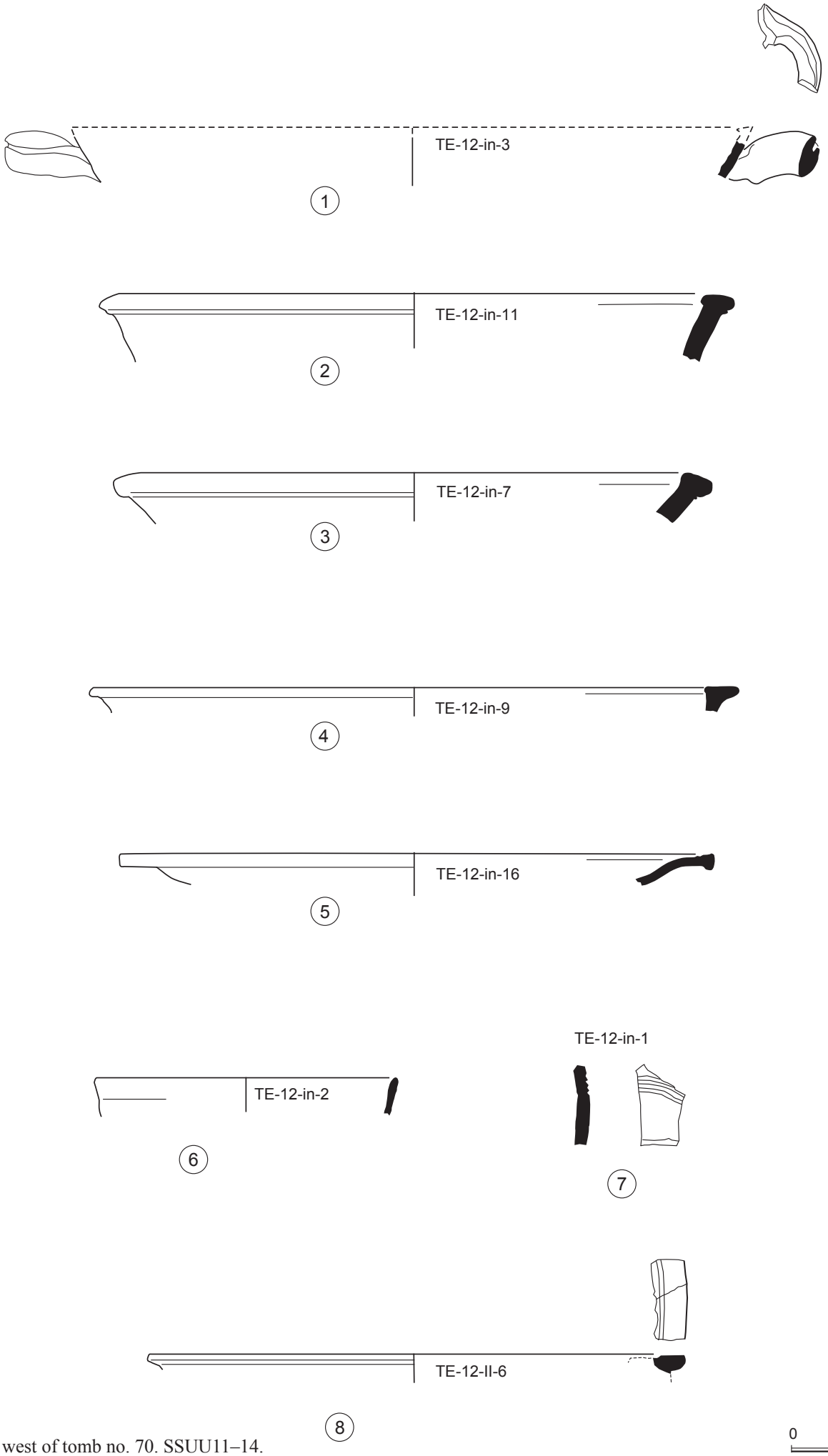
4

5

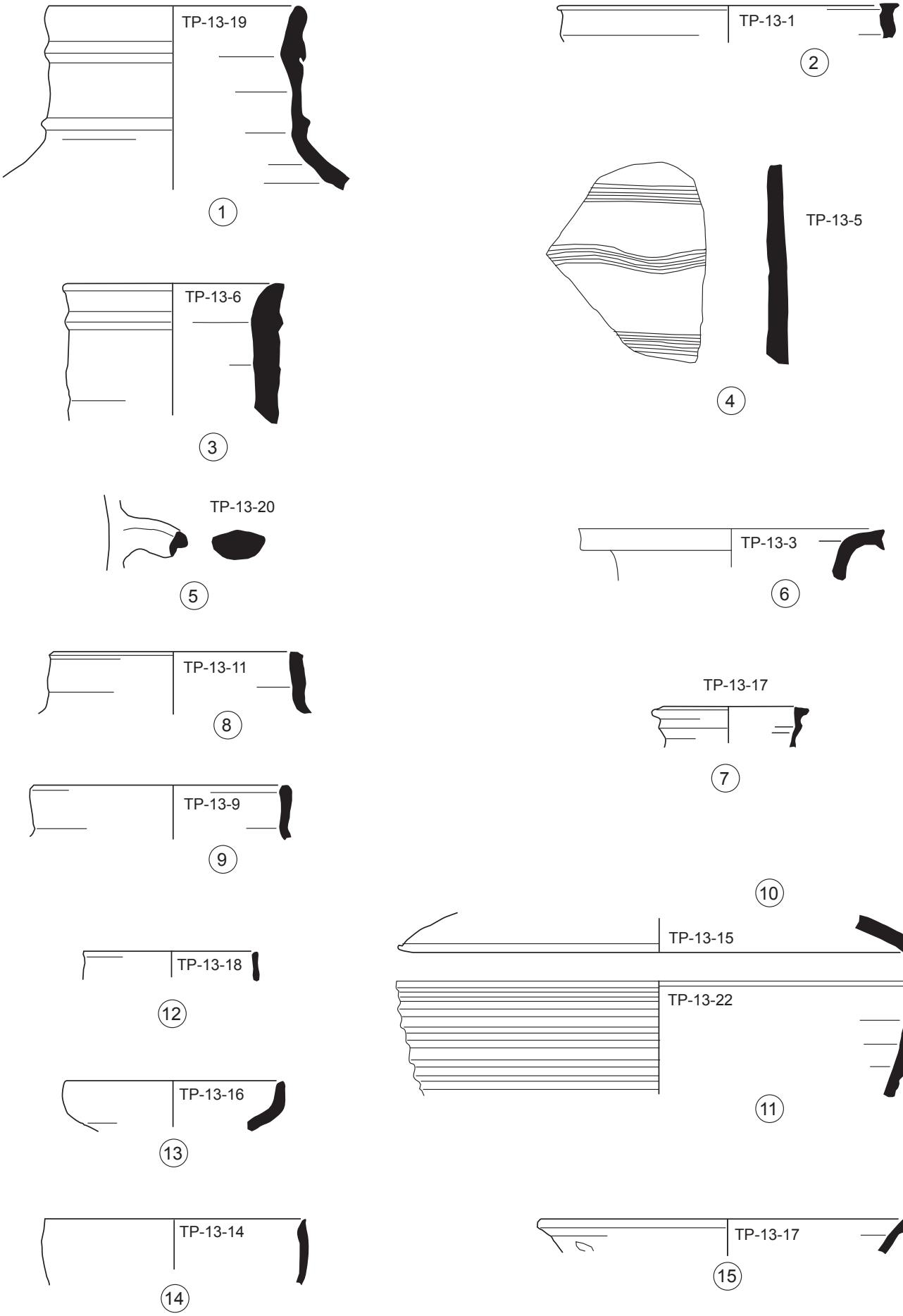
Survey under the buttress. SU9.

0 5 cm

Plate 16

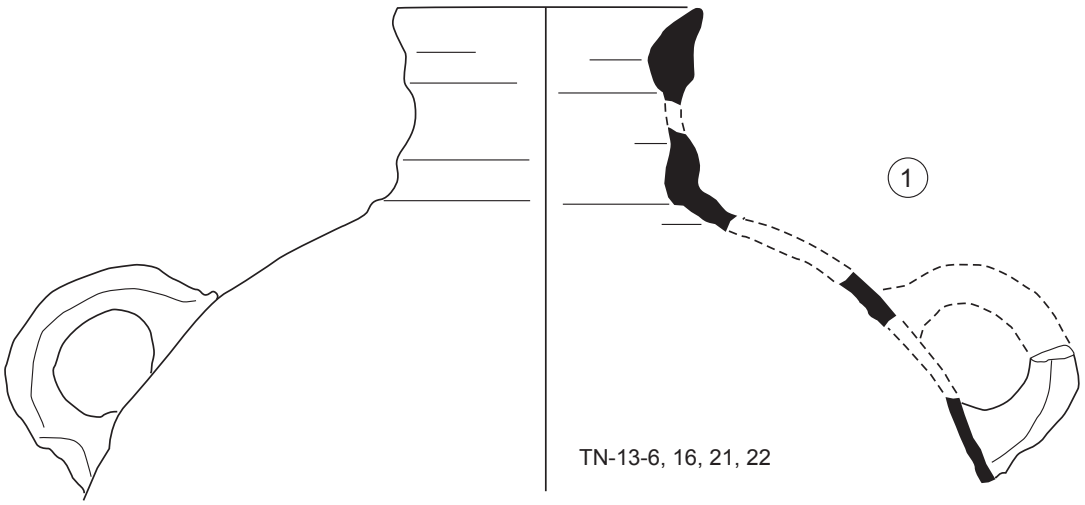


Survey west of tomb no. 70. SSUU11–14.



Survey under the ambo. SU19.

Plate 18



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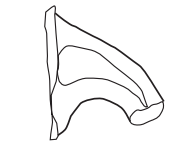

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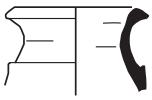

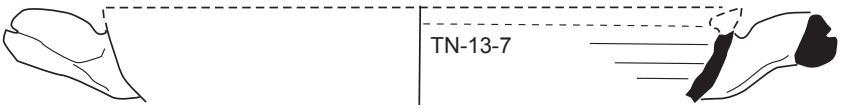

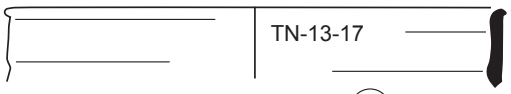

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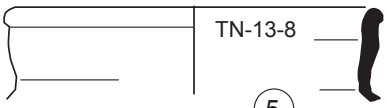

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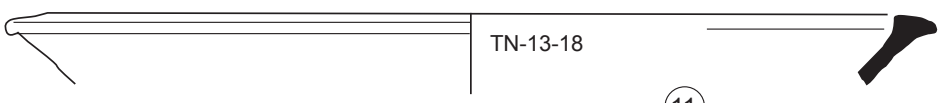

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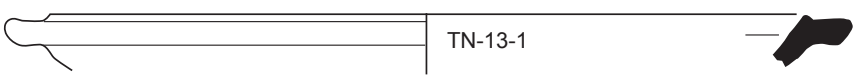
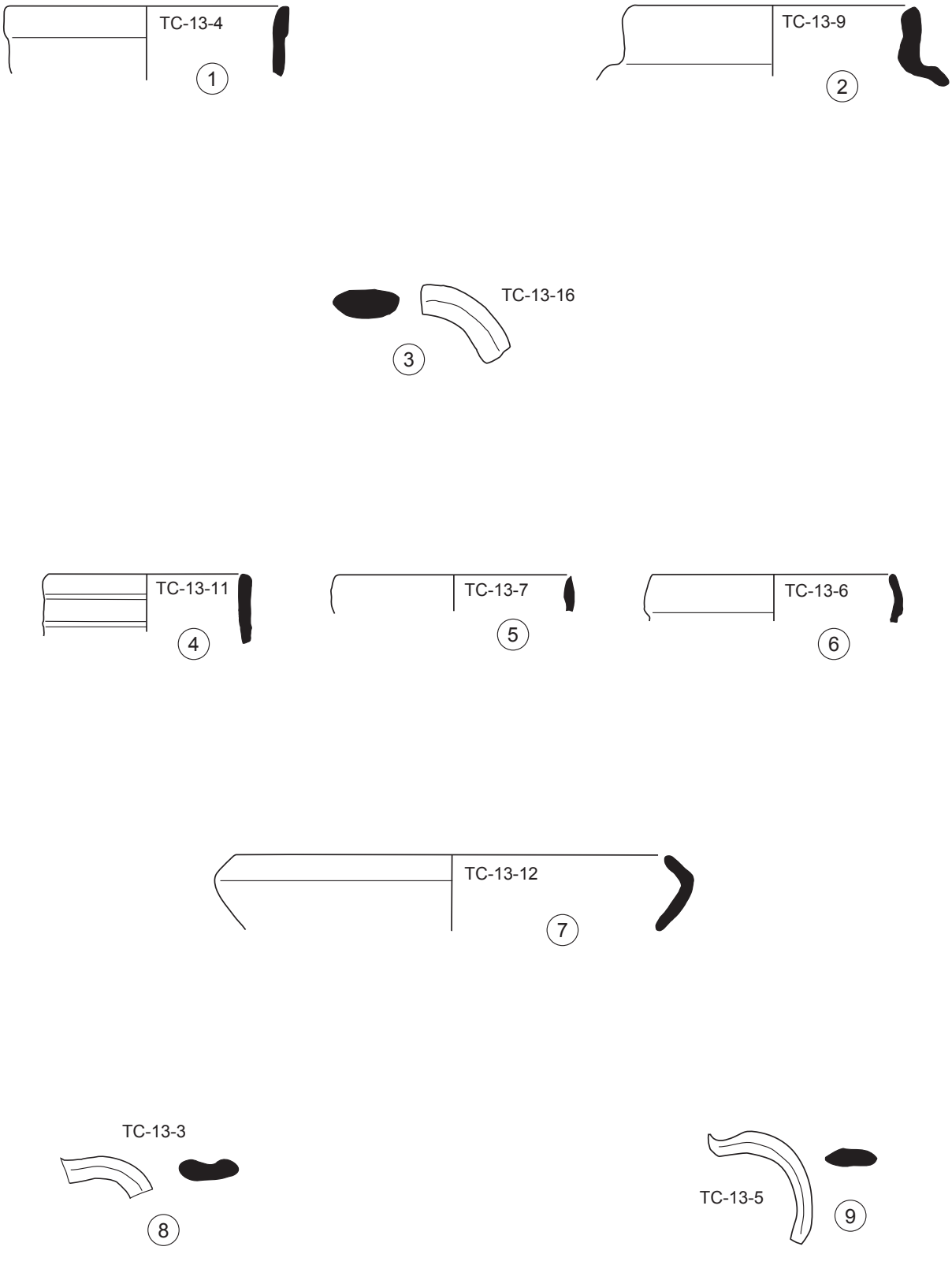


12

Survey in the central nave. SU23.

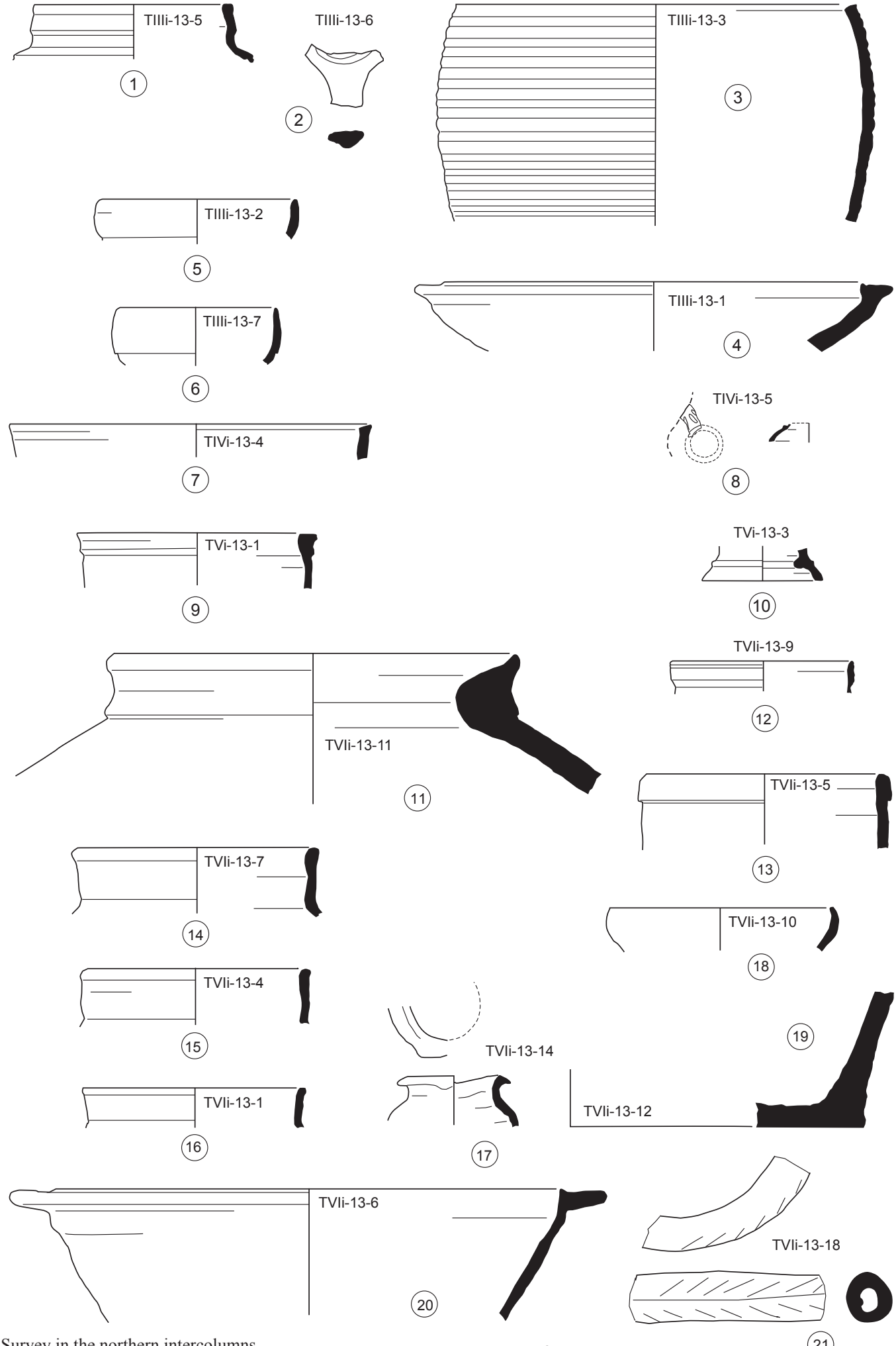
0 5 cm



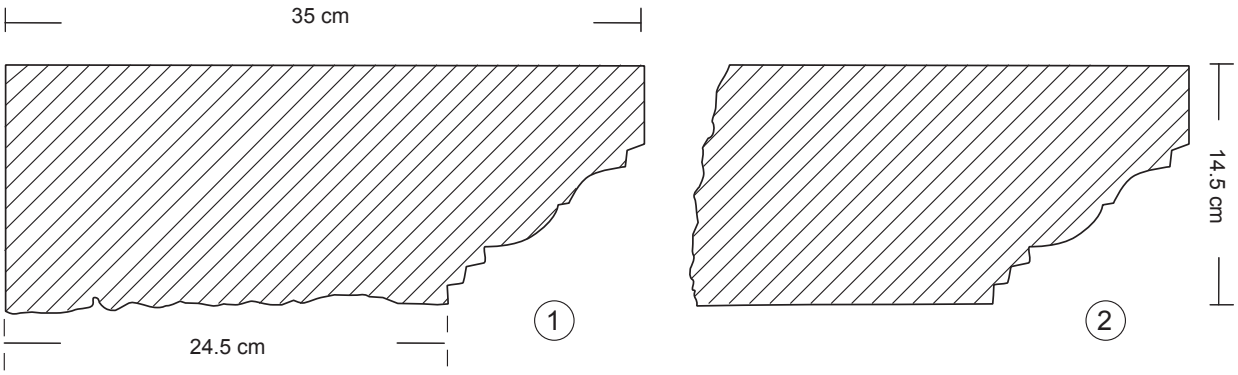
Survey in the central nave. SU25.

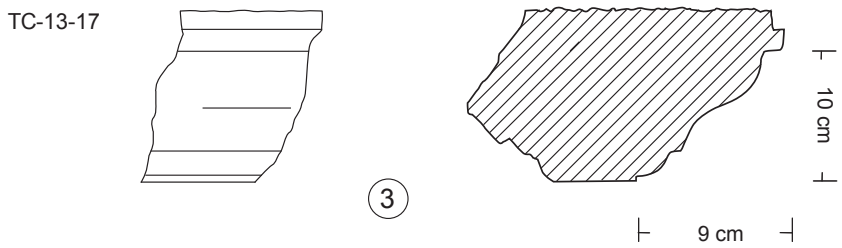
0 5 cm

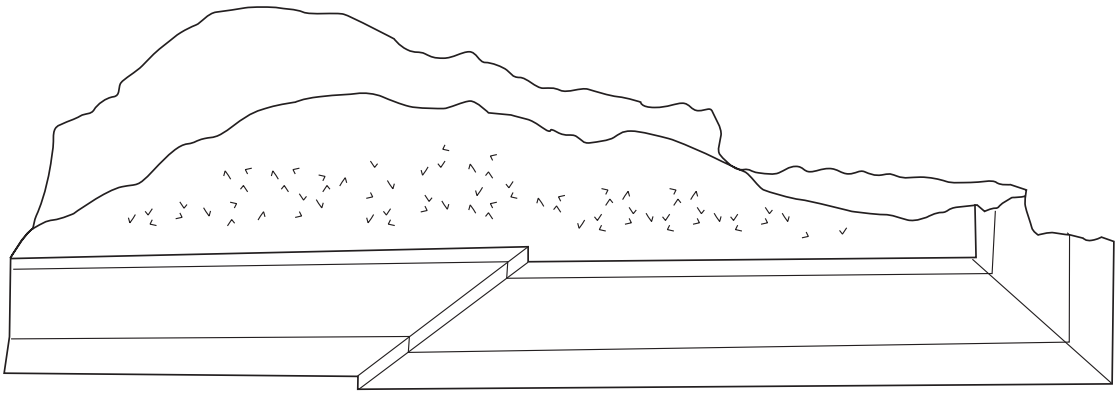
Plate 20

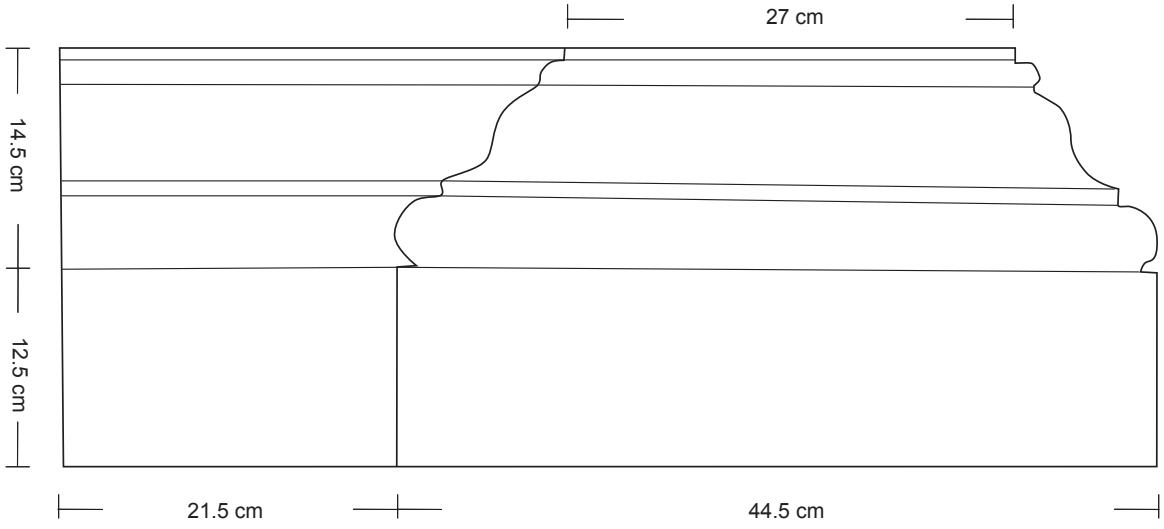


Survey in the northern intercolumns.





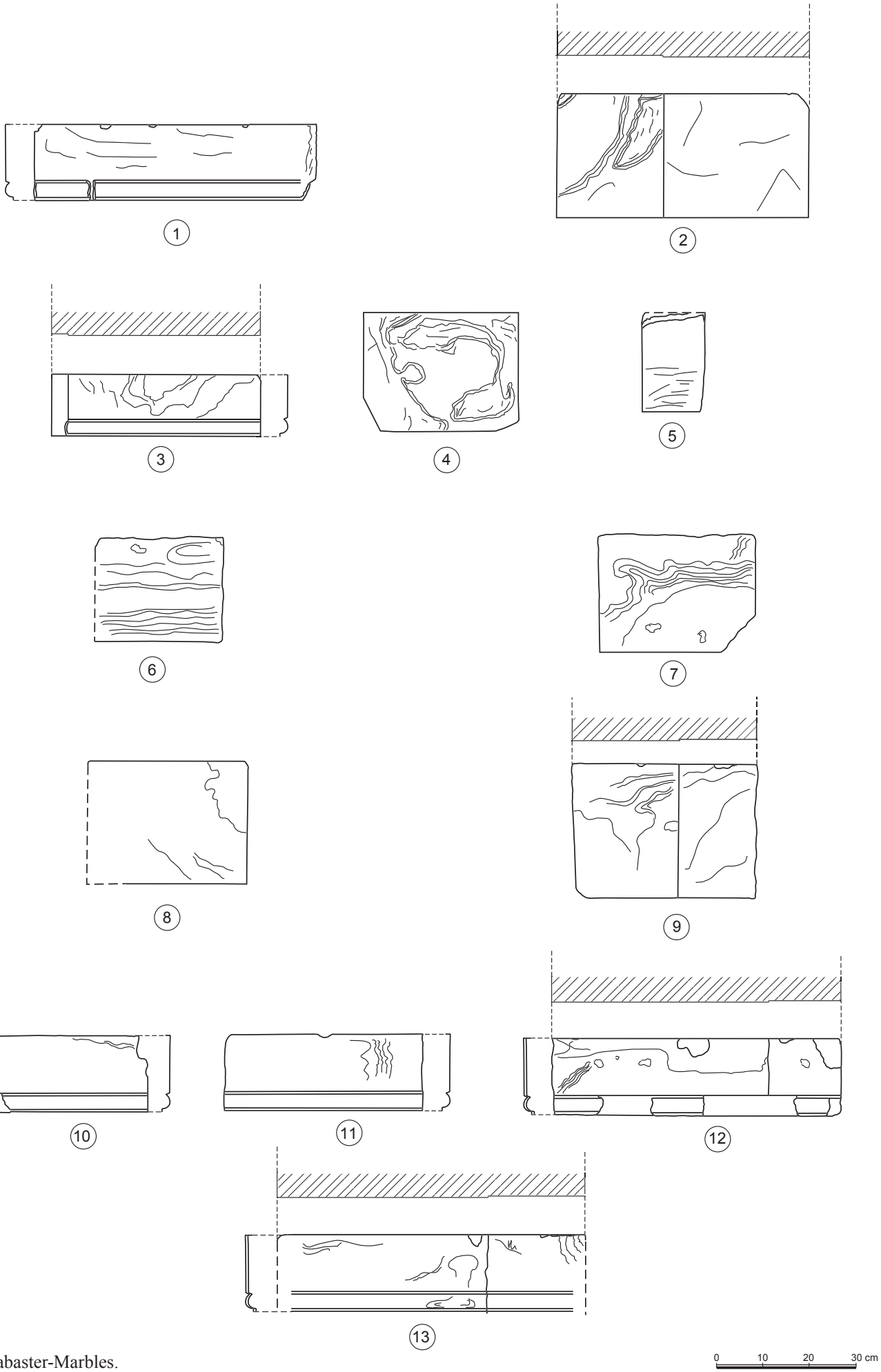




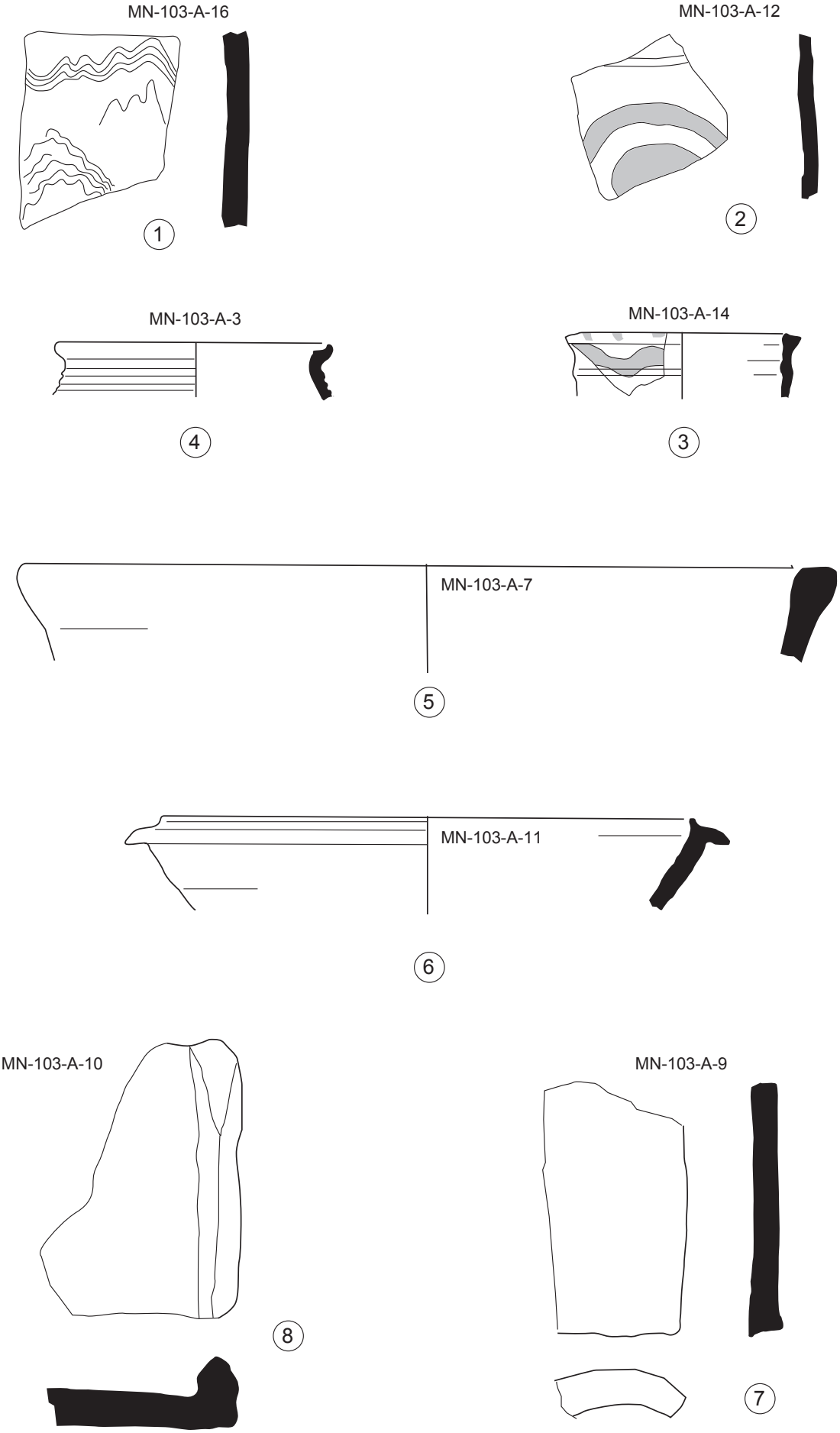
Alabaster-Marbles.

0 5 10 15 cm

Plate 22

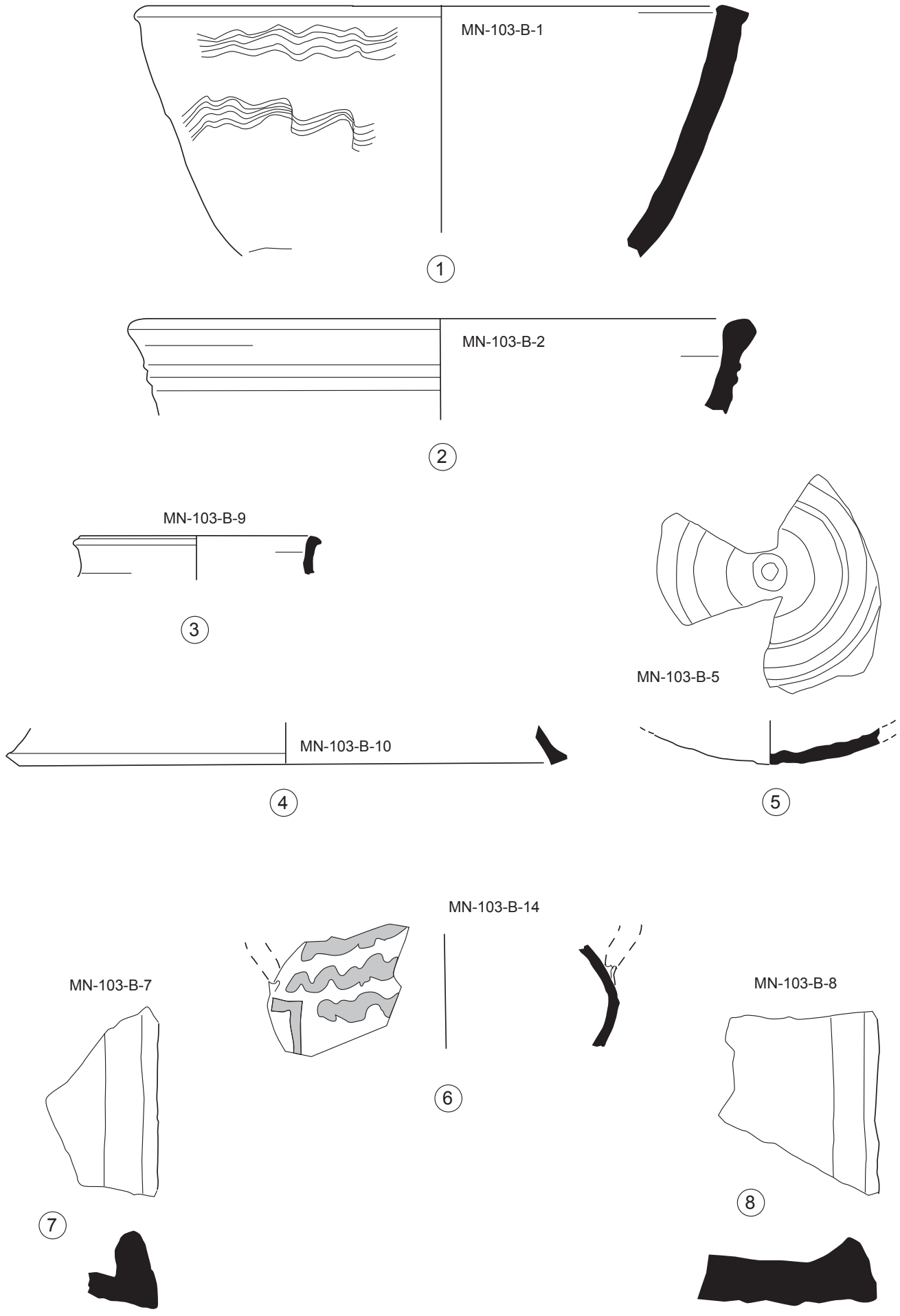


Alabaster-Marbles.



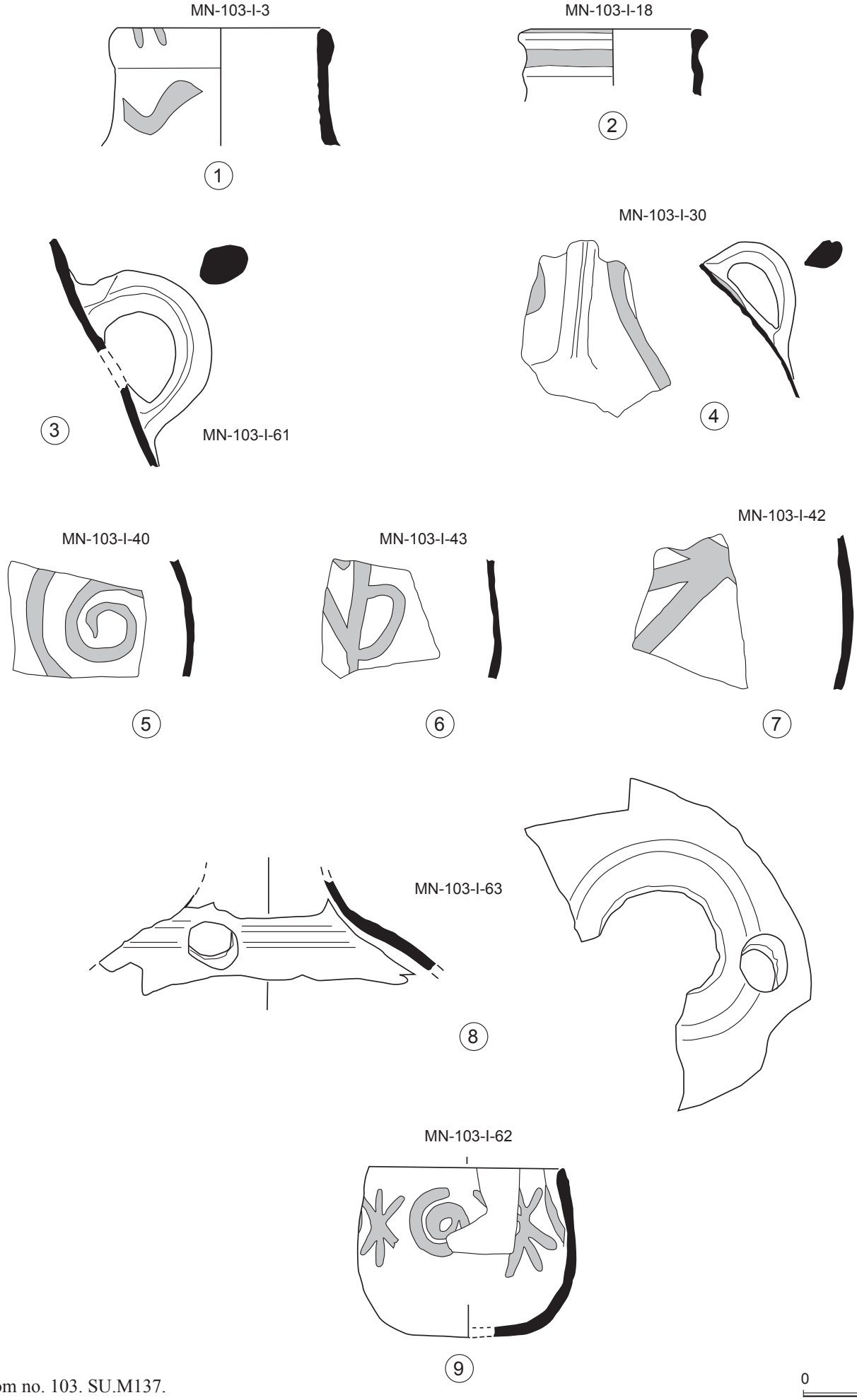
Room no. 103. SU.M1031.

Plate 24



Room no. 103. SU.M1032.

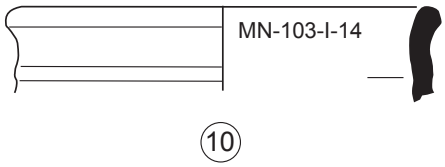
0 5 cm



Room no. 103. SU.M137.

0 5 cm

Plate 26



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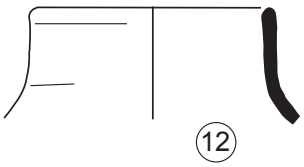

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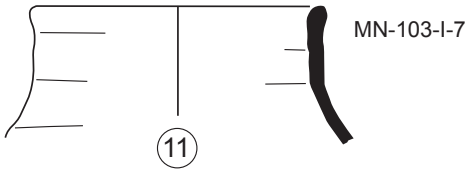

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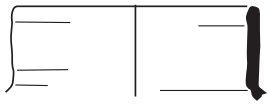

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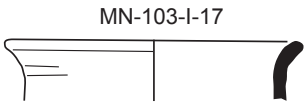

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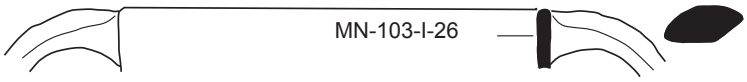

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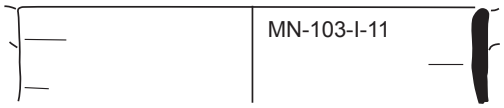

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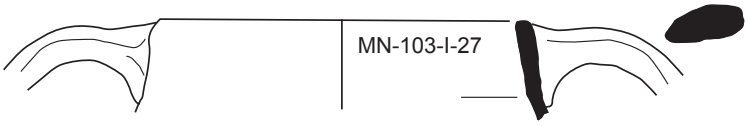

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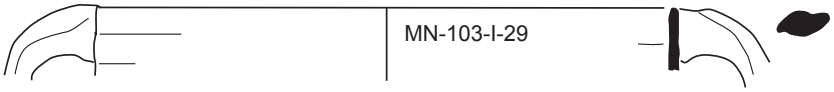

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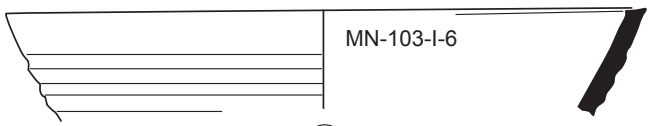

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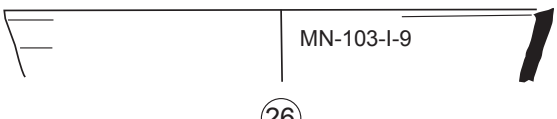
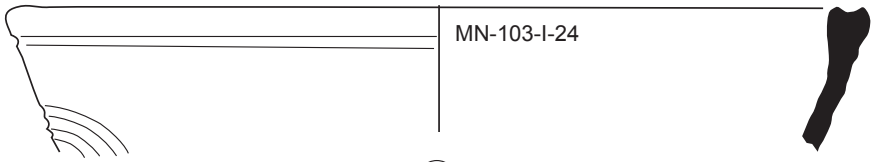


26

Room no. 103. SU.M1037.

0 5 cm



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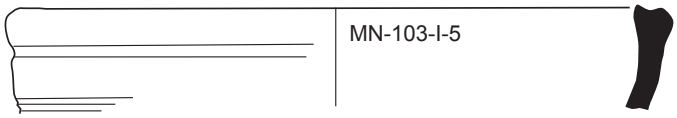

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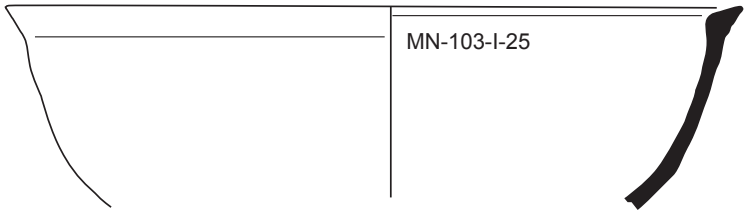

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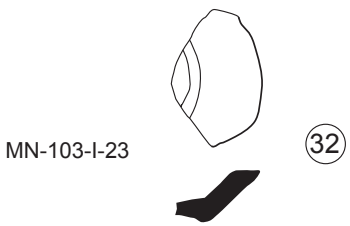

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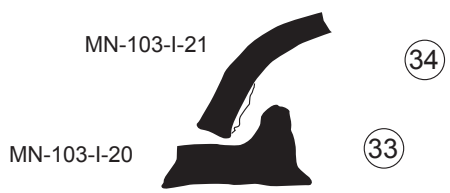

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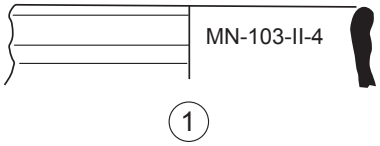
33

Room no. 103. SU.M1037.

0 5 cm

Plate 28



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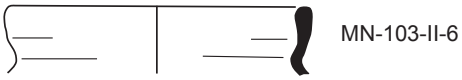

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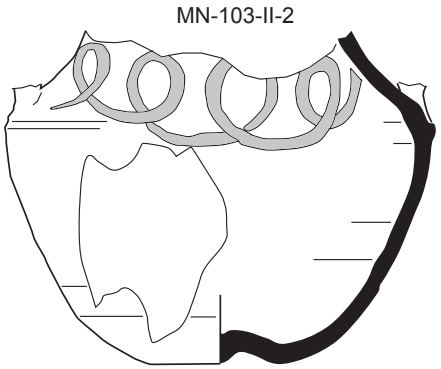

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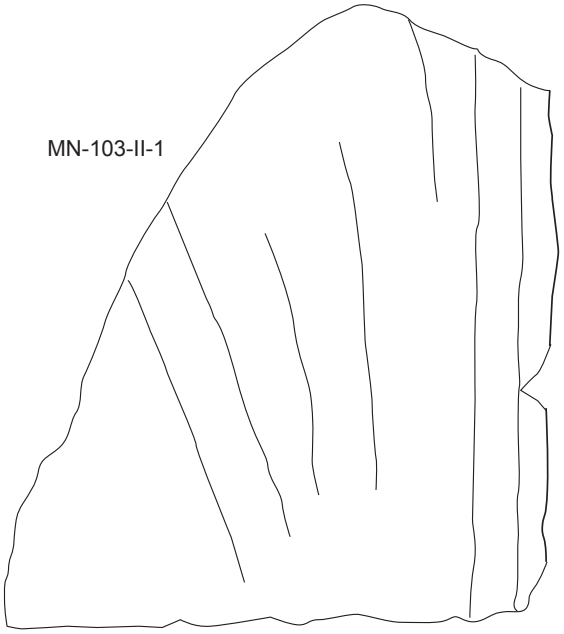

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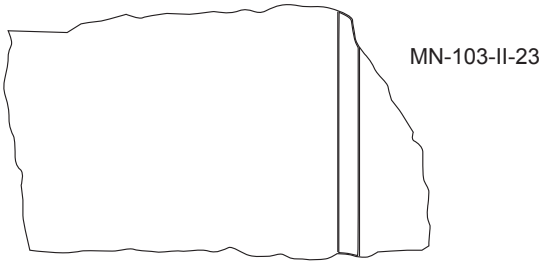

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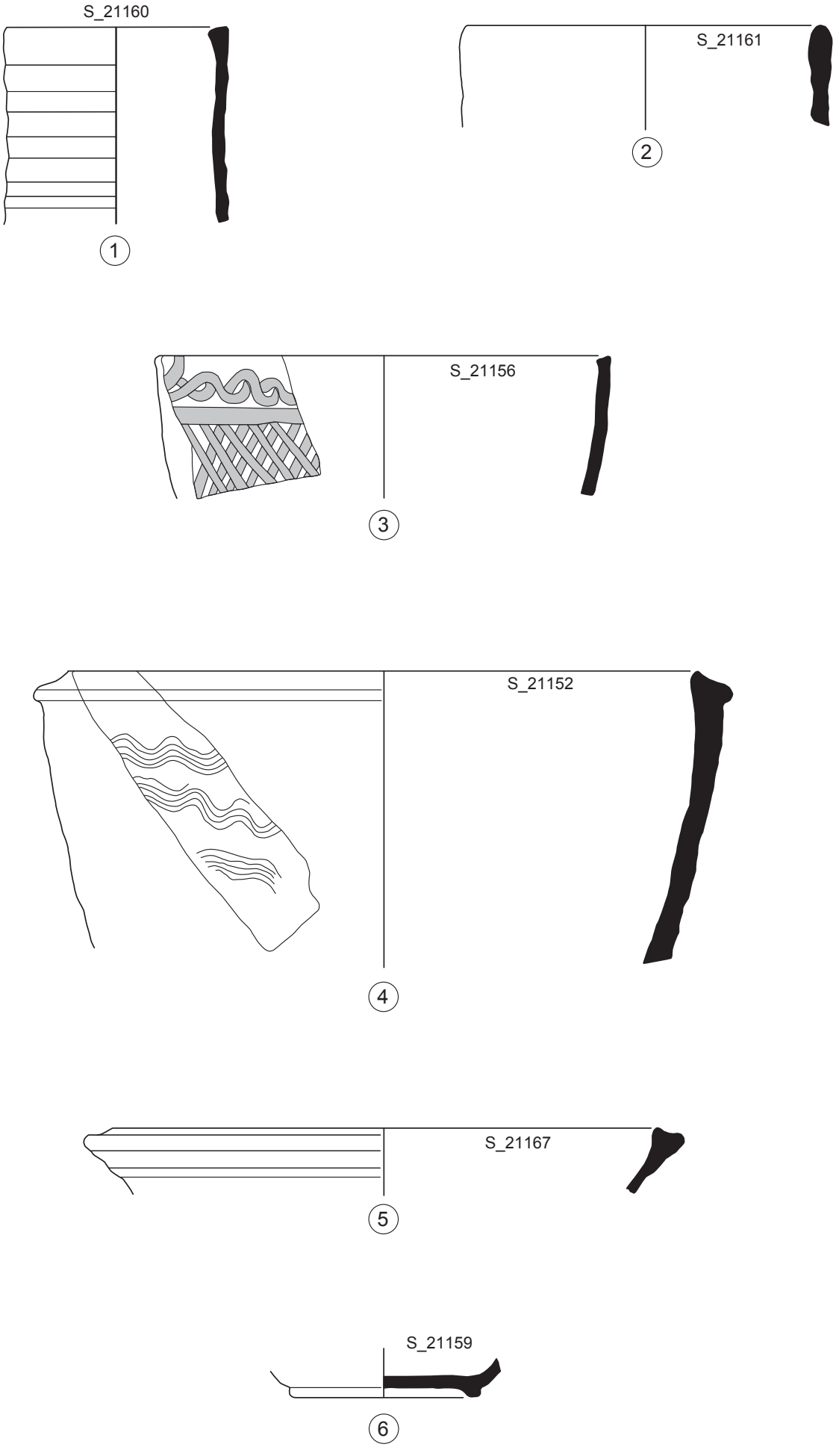
Room no. 103. SU.M1039.

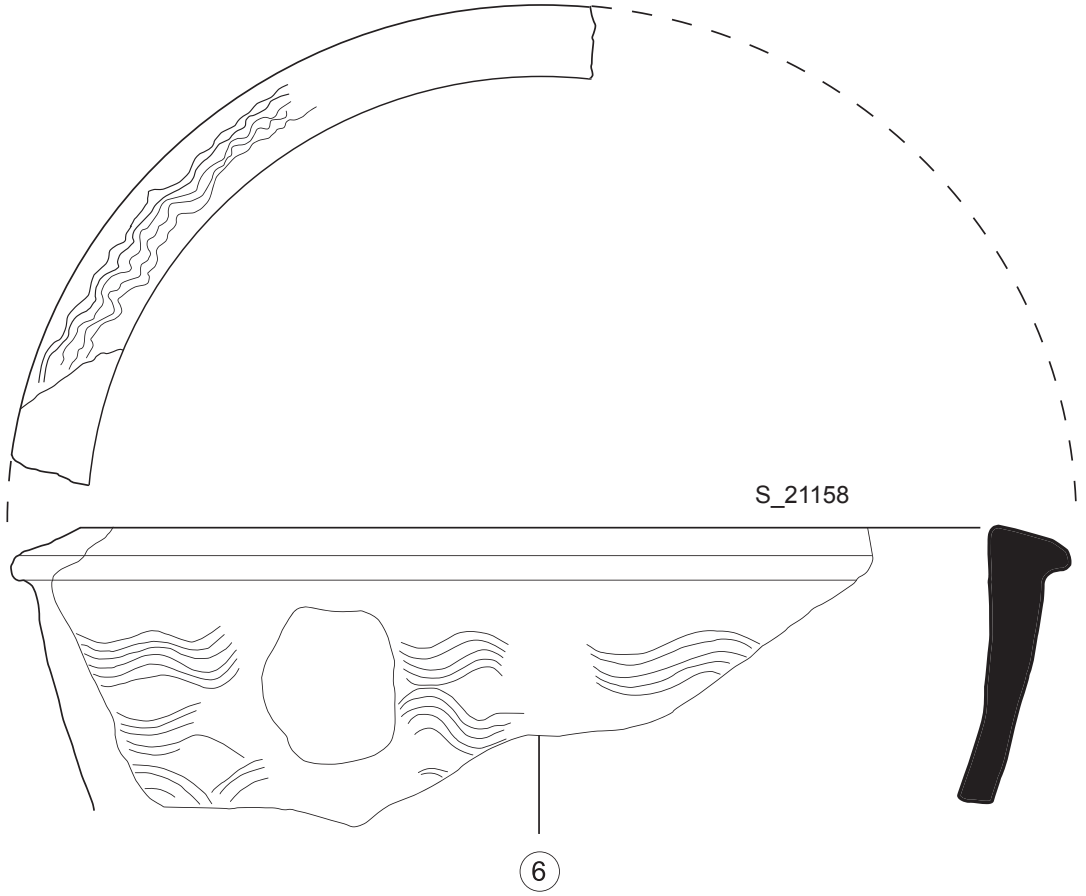
0 5 cm

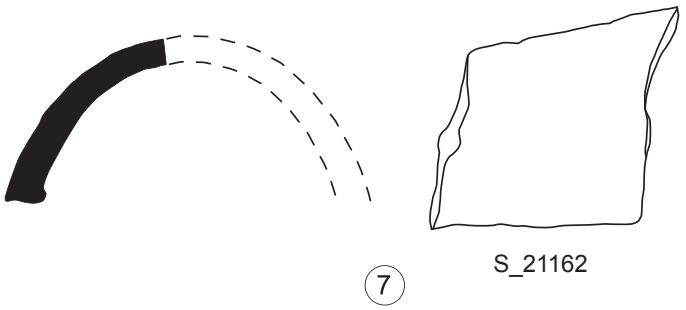


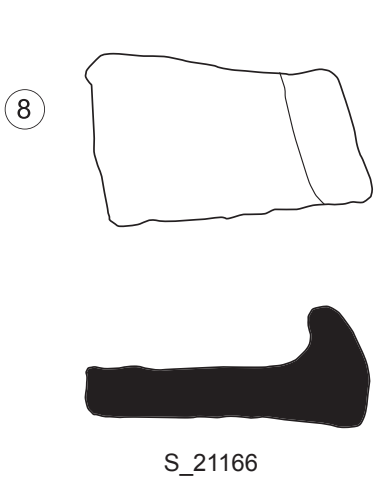
Cistern no. 8. SU100.

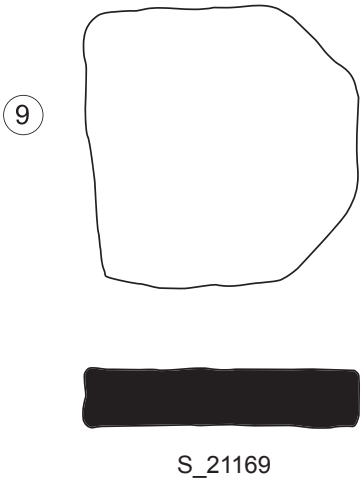
0 5 cm

Plate 30



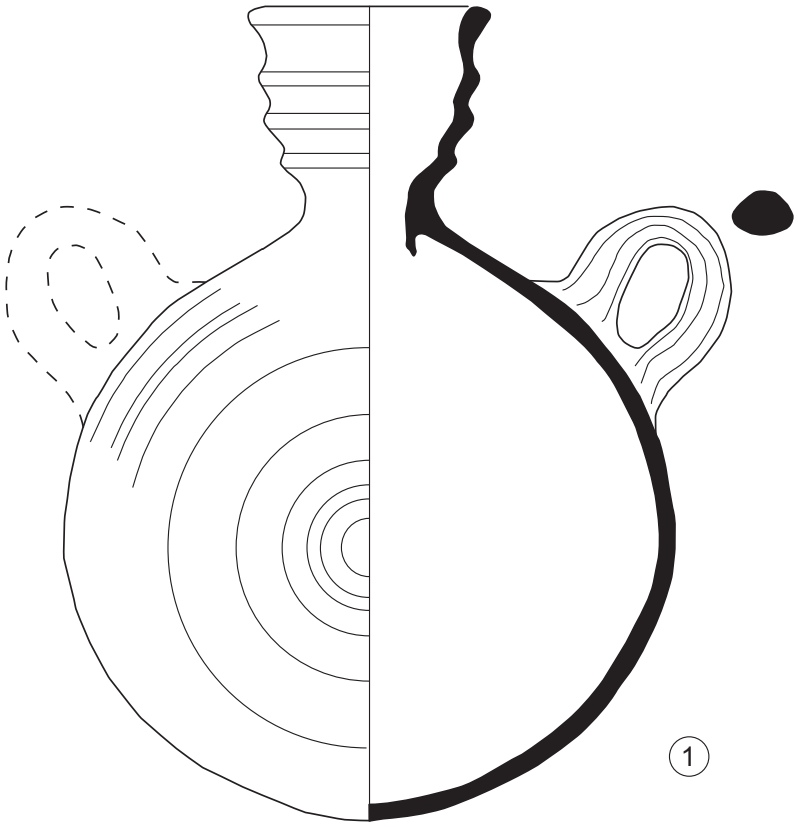




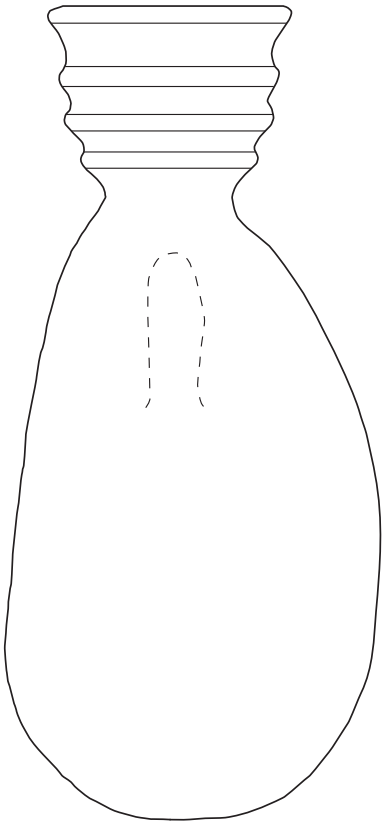


Cistern no. 8. SU100.

0 5 cm



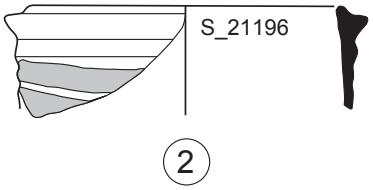
S_21200_21240_21292



Cistern no. 8. SU300.

0 5 cm

Plate 32



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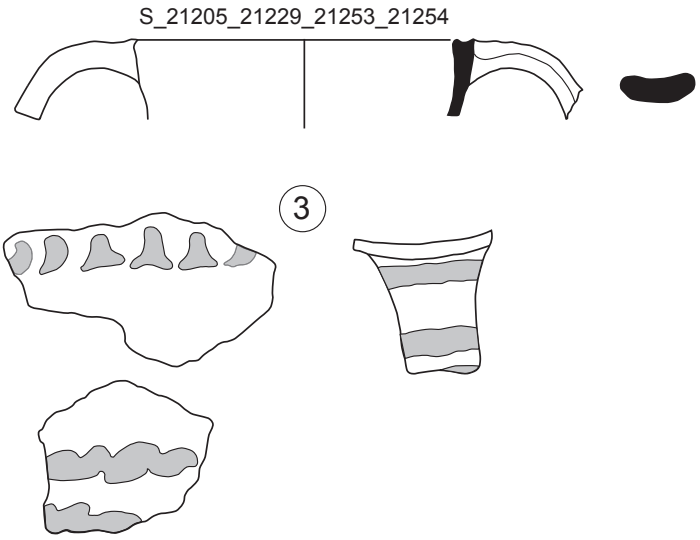

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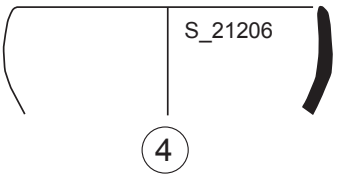

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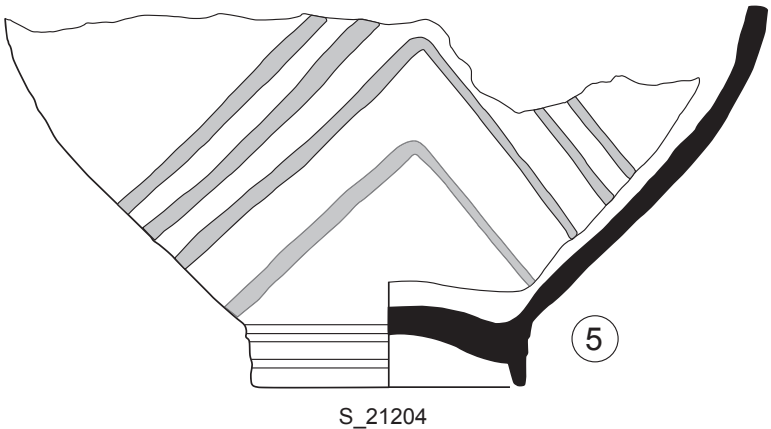

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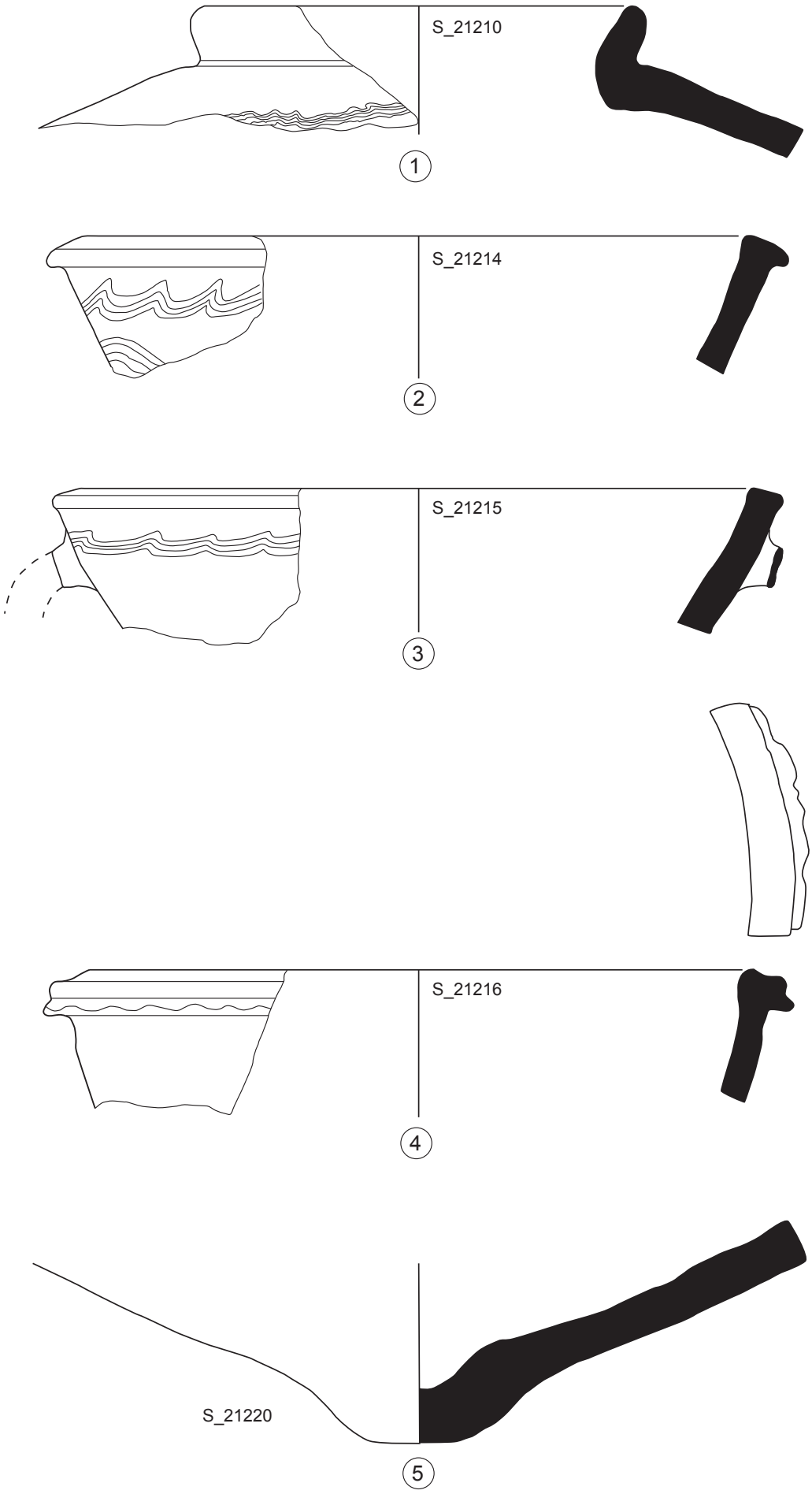
Cistern no. 8. SU300.

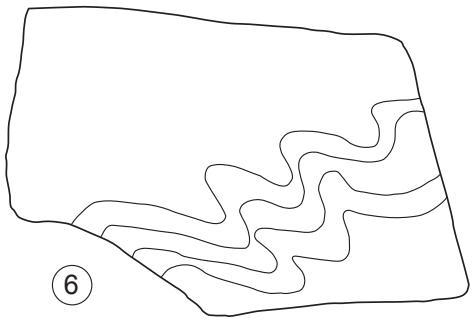
0 5 cm



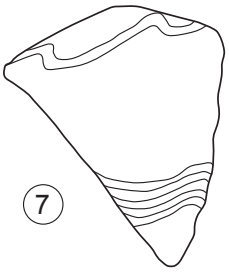
Cistern no. 8. SU301.

0 5 cm

Plate 34

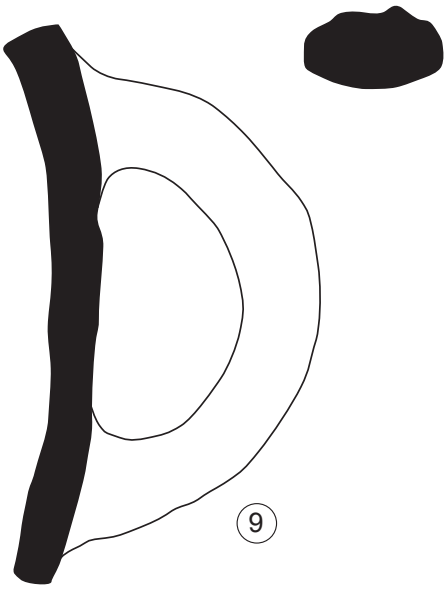


S_21211

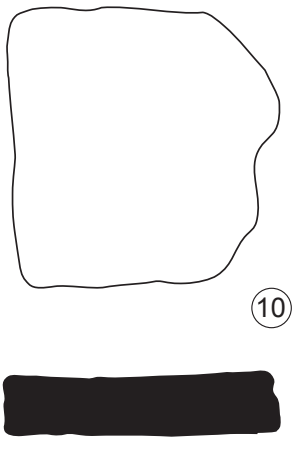


S_21217

S_21212



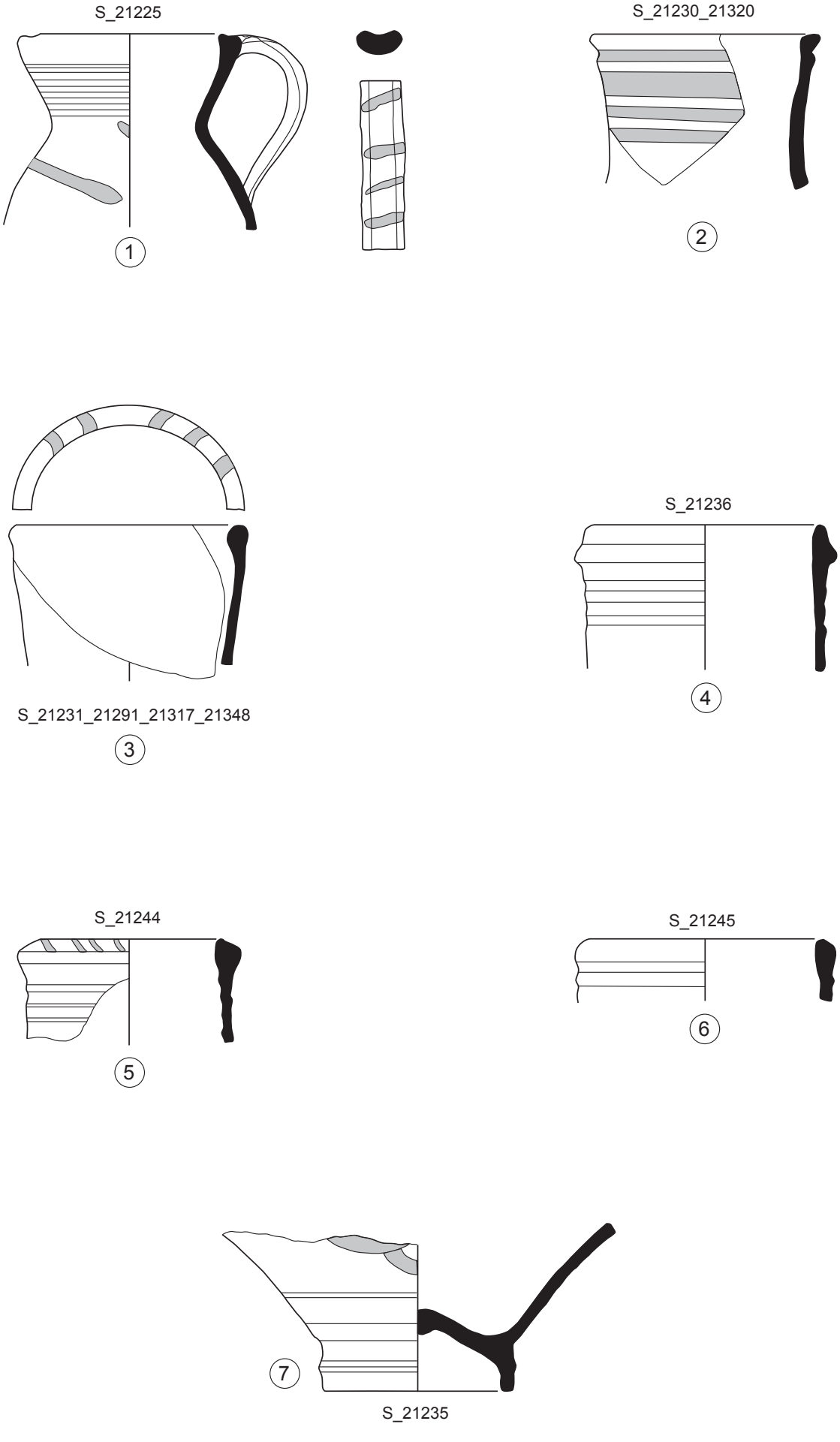
S_21223



S_21219

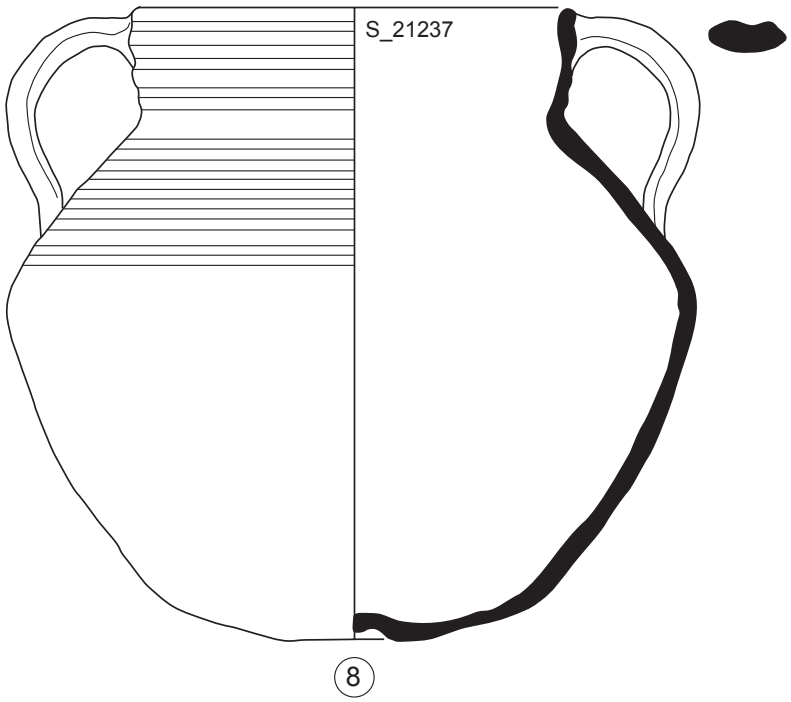
Cistern no. 8. SU301.

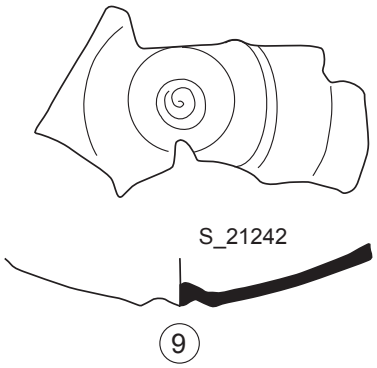
0 5 cm

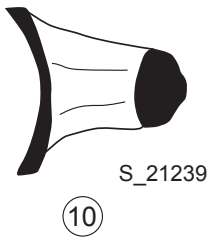


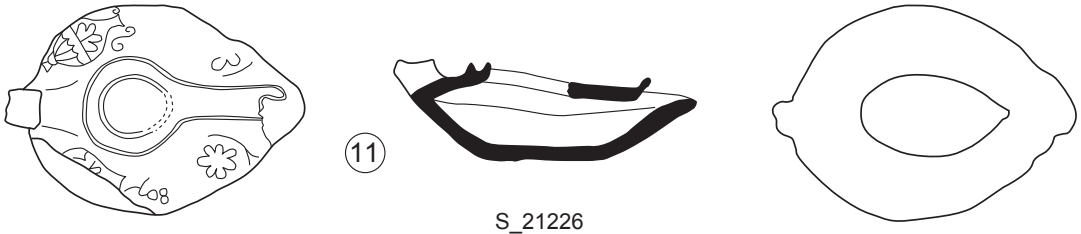
Cistern no. 8. SU302.

Plate 36



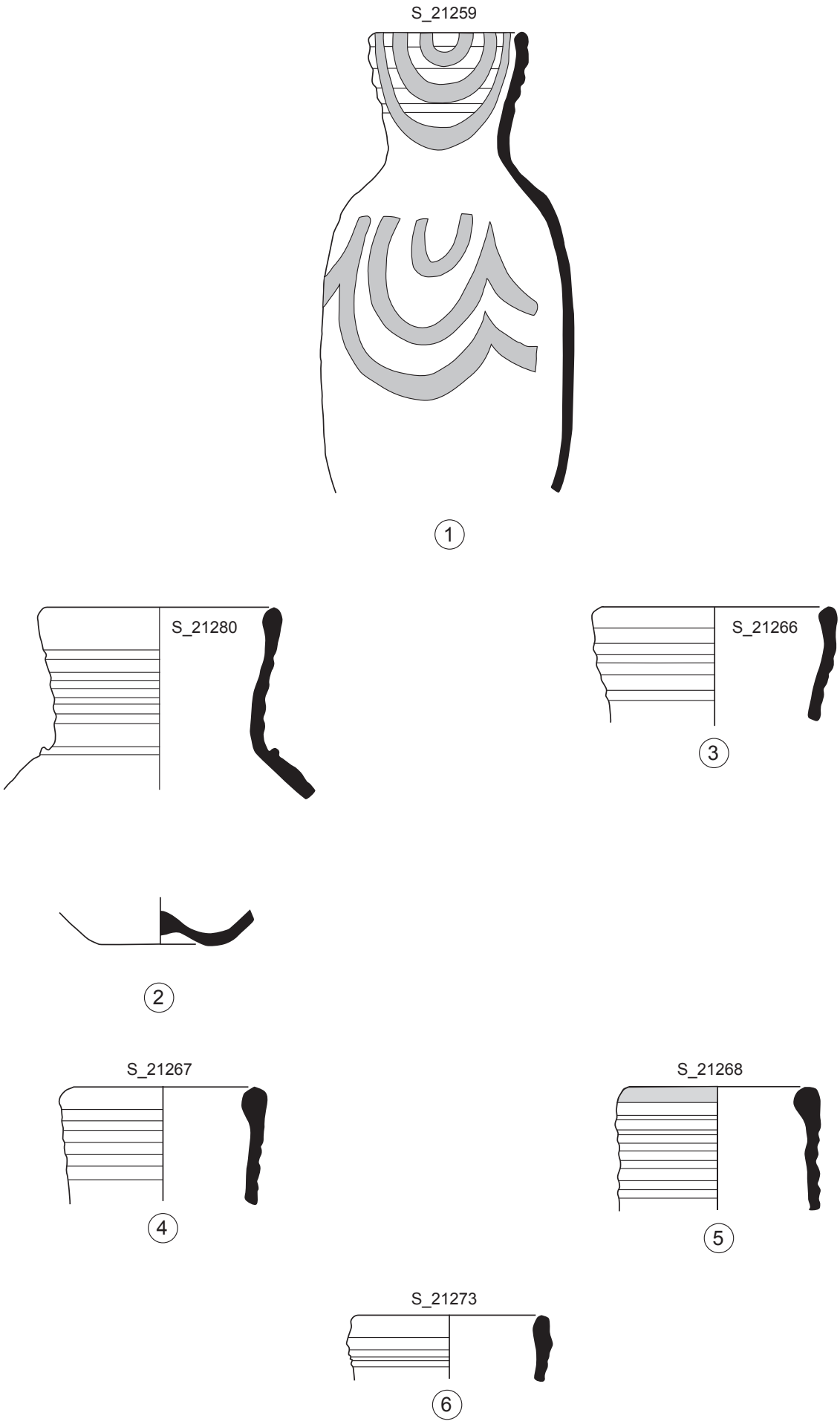






Cistern no. 8. SU302.

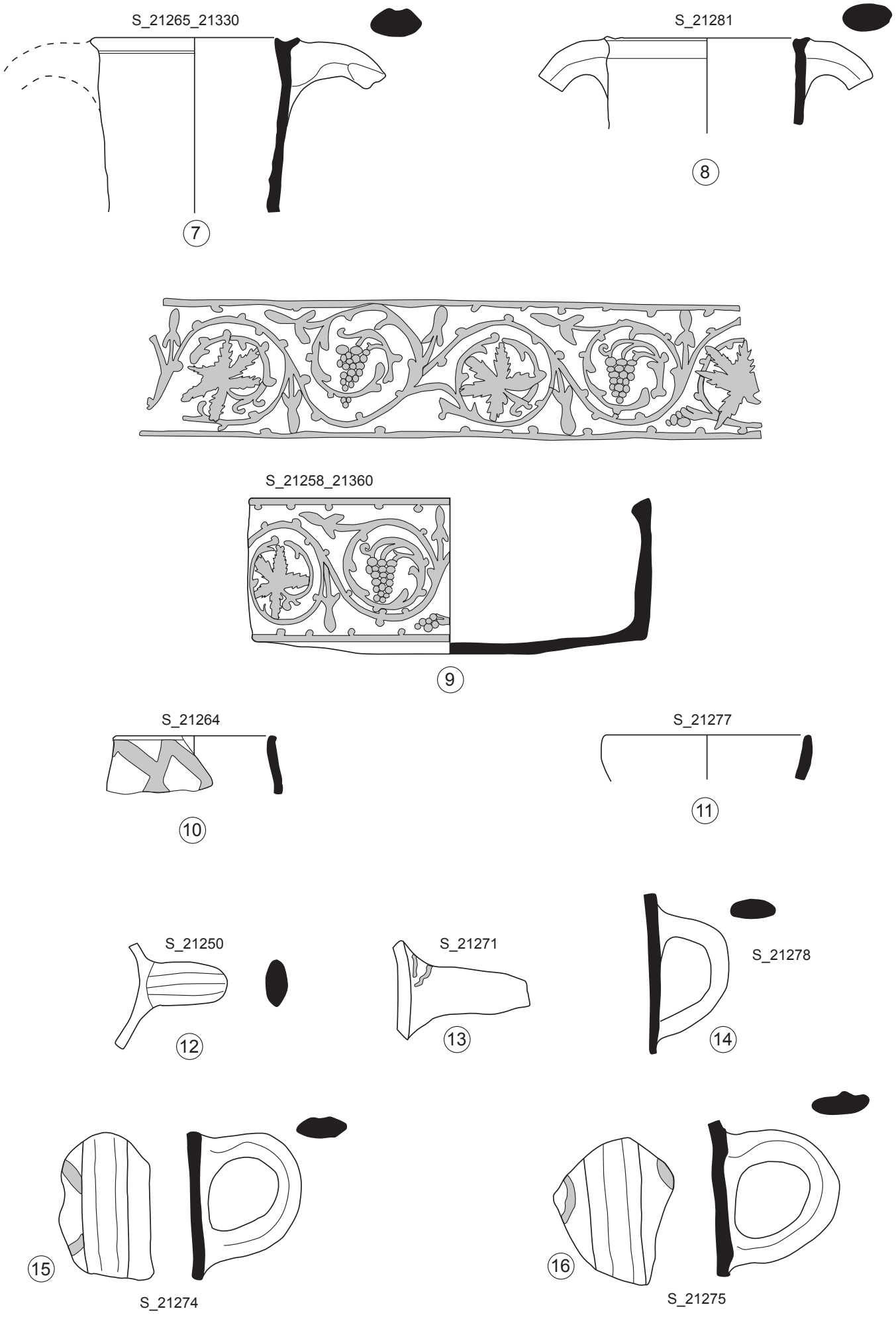
0 5 cm



Cistern no. 8. SU303.

0 5 cm

Plate 38



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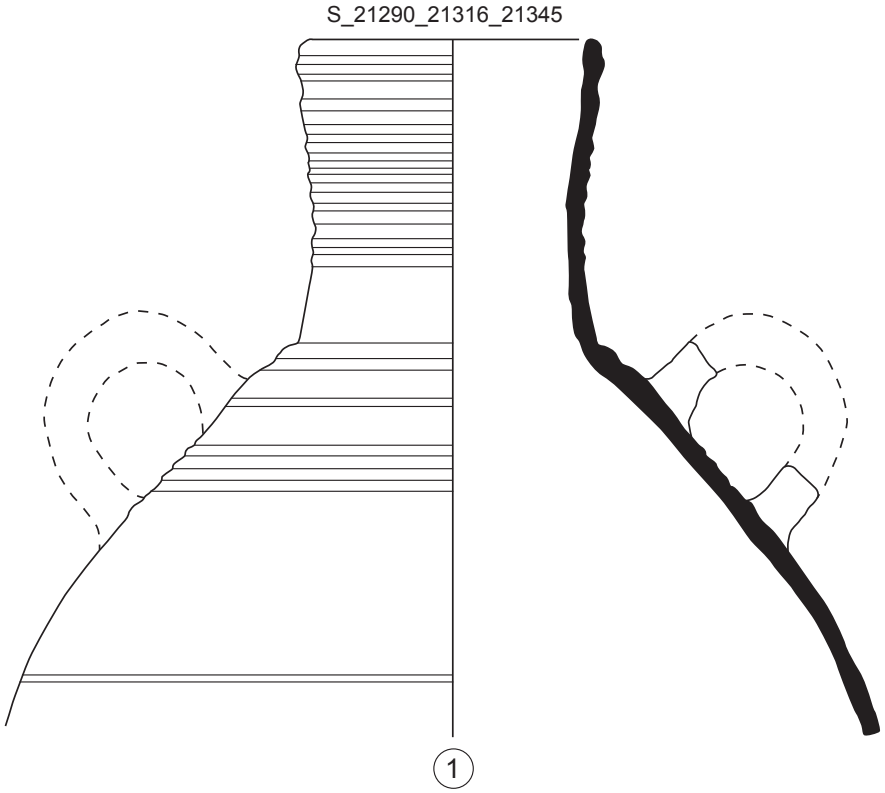
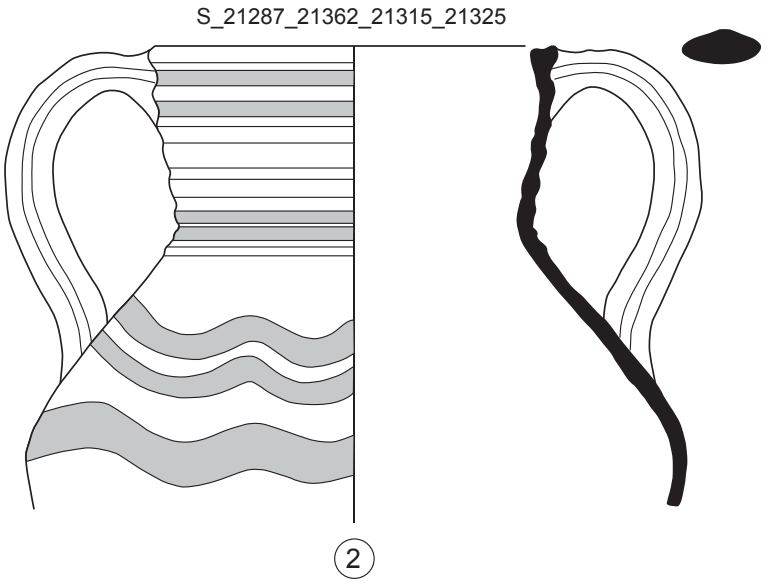
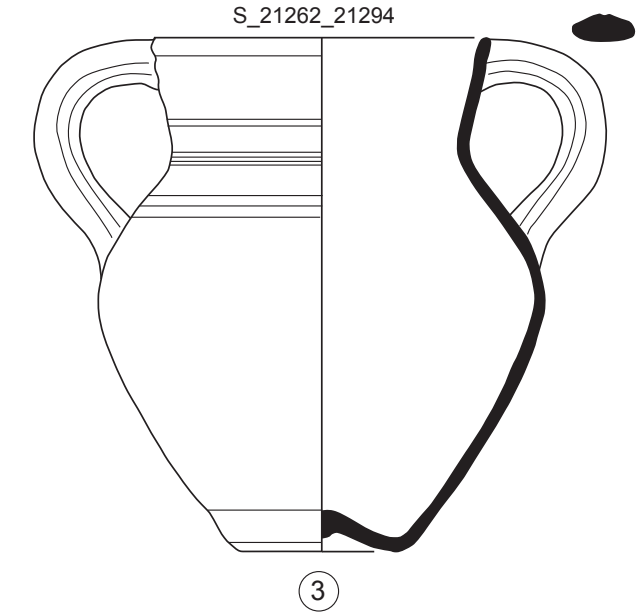
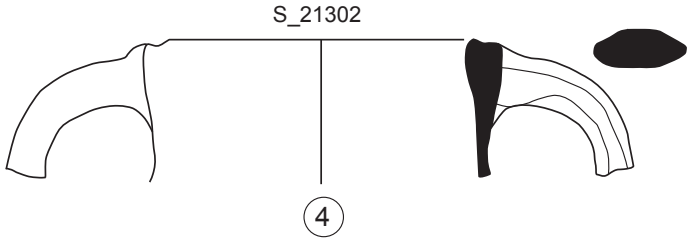


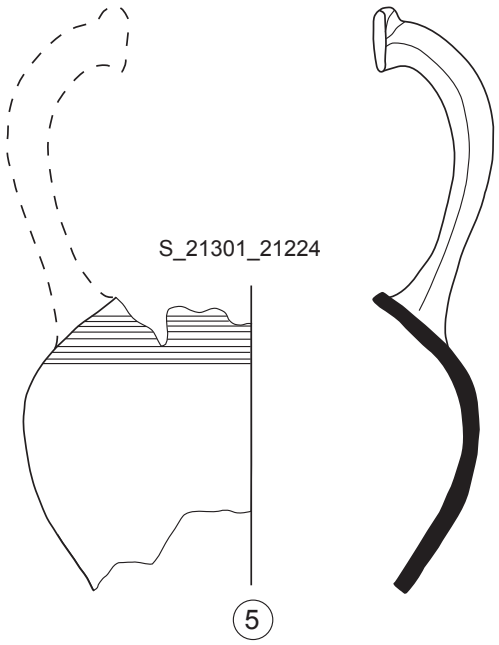


Cistern no. 8. SU400.

0 5 cm

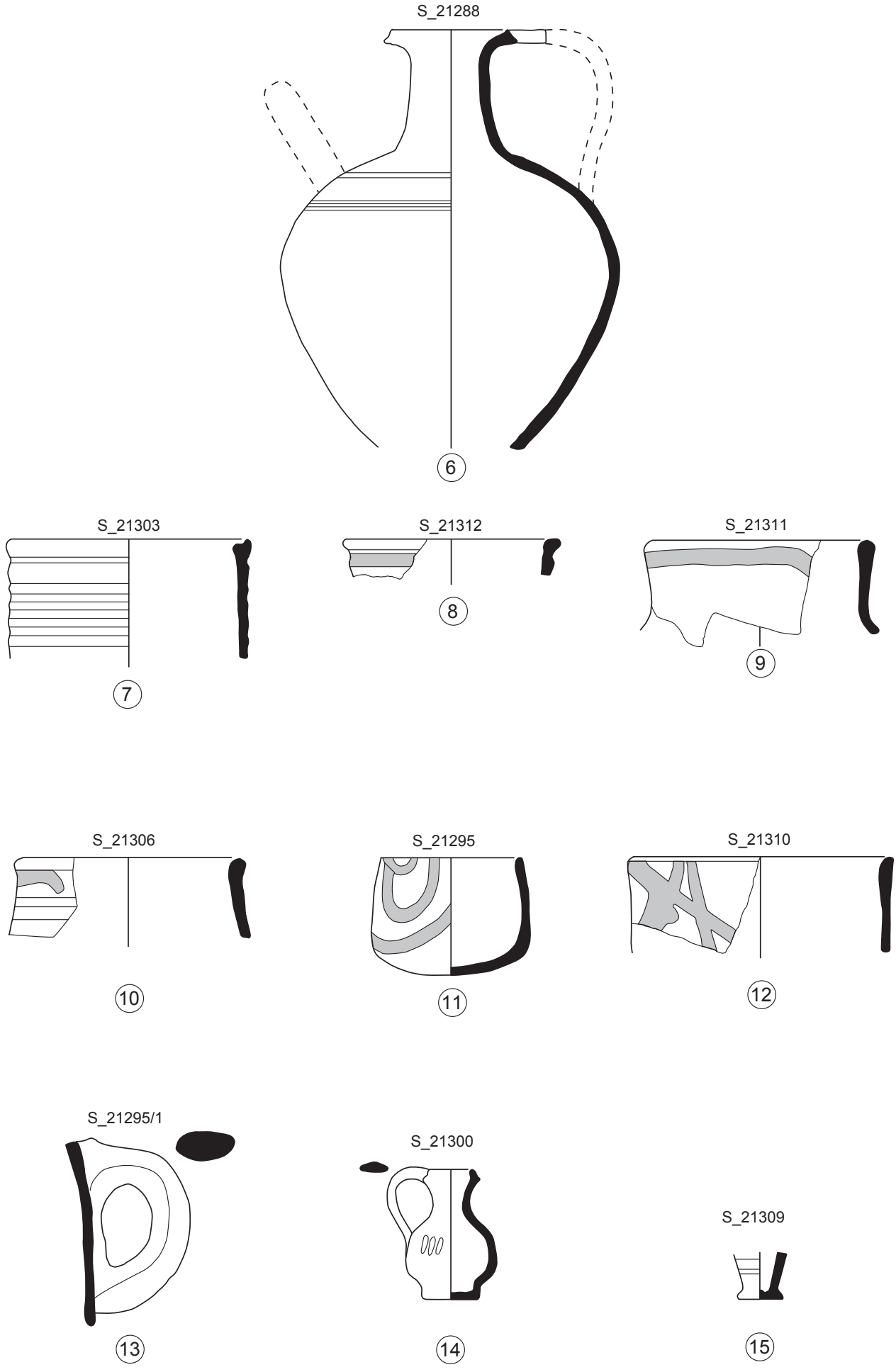






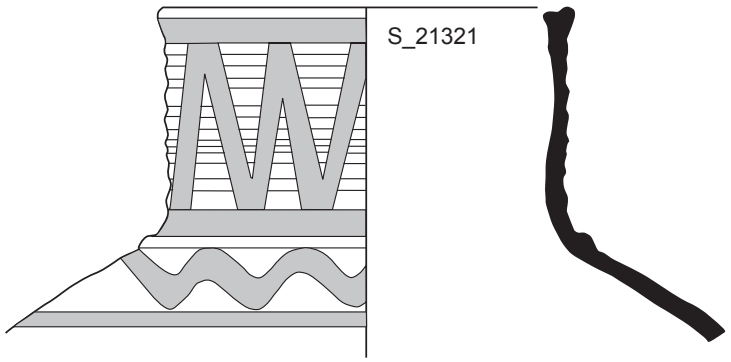
Cistern no. 8. SU400.

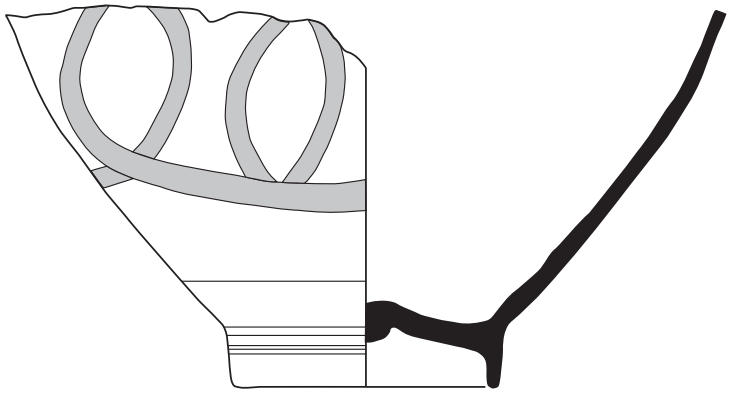
0 5 cm



Cistern no. 8. SU400.

Plate 42





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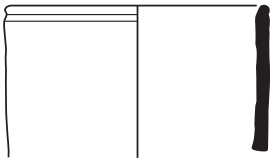
S_21319



2

S_21326

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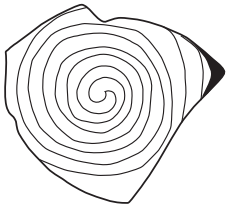


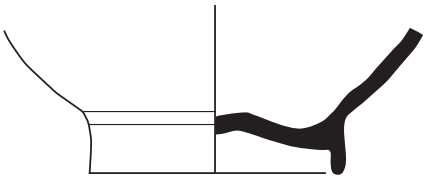
S_21321/4

4

S_21324

5

S_21327



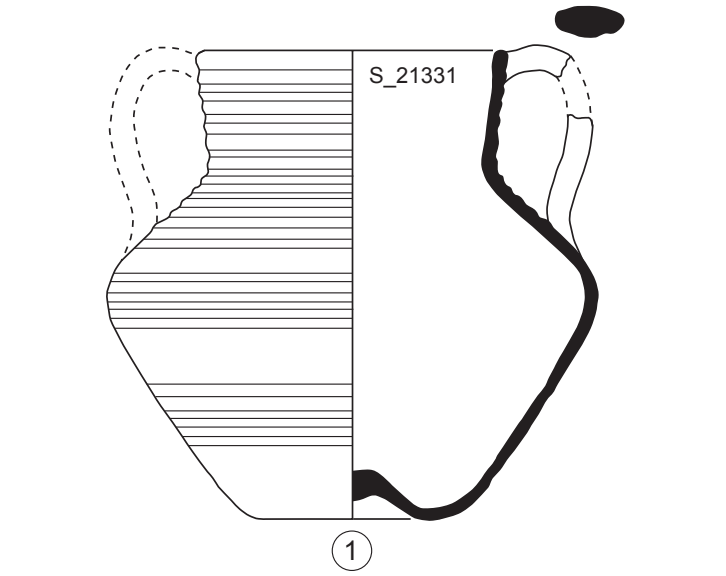
7

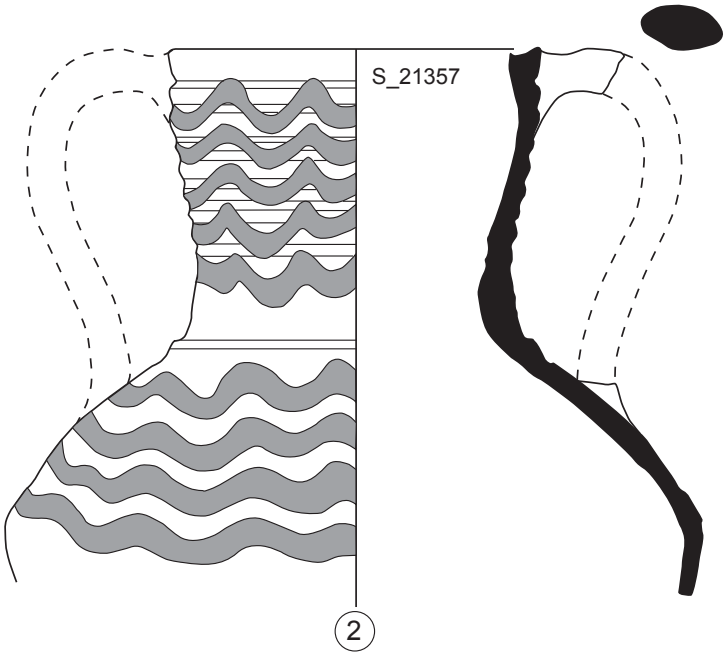
S_21323

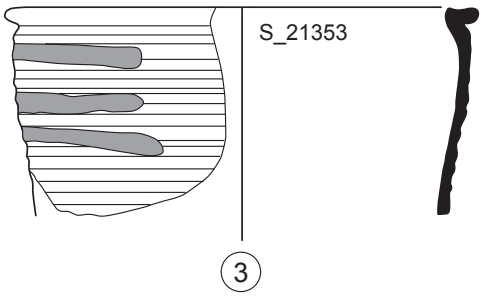
6

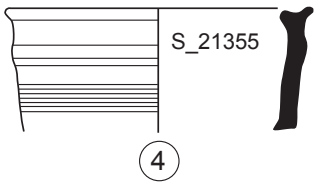
Cistern no. 8. SU401.

0 5 cm





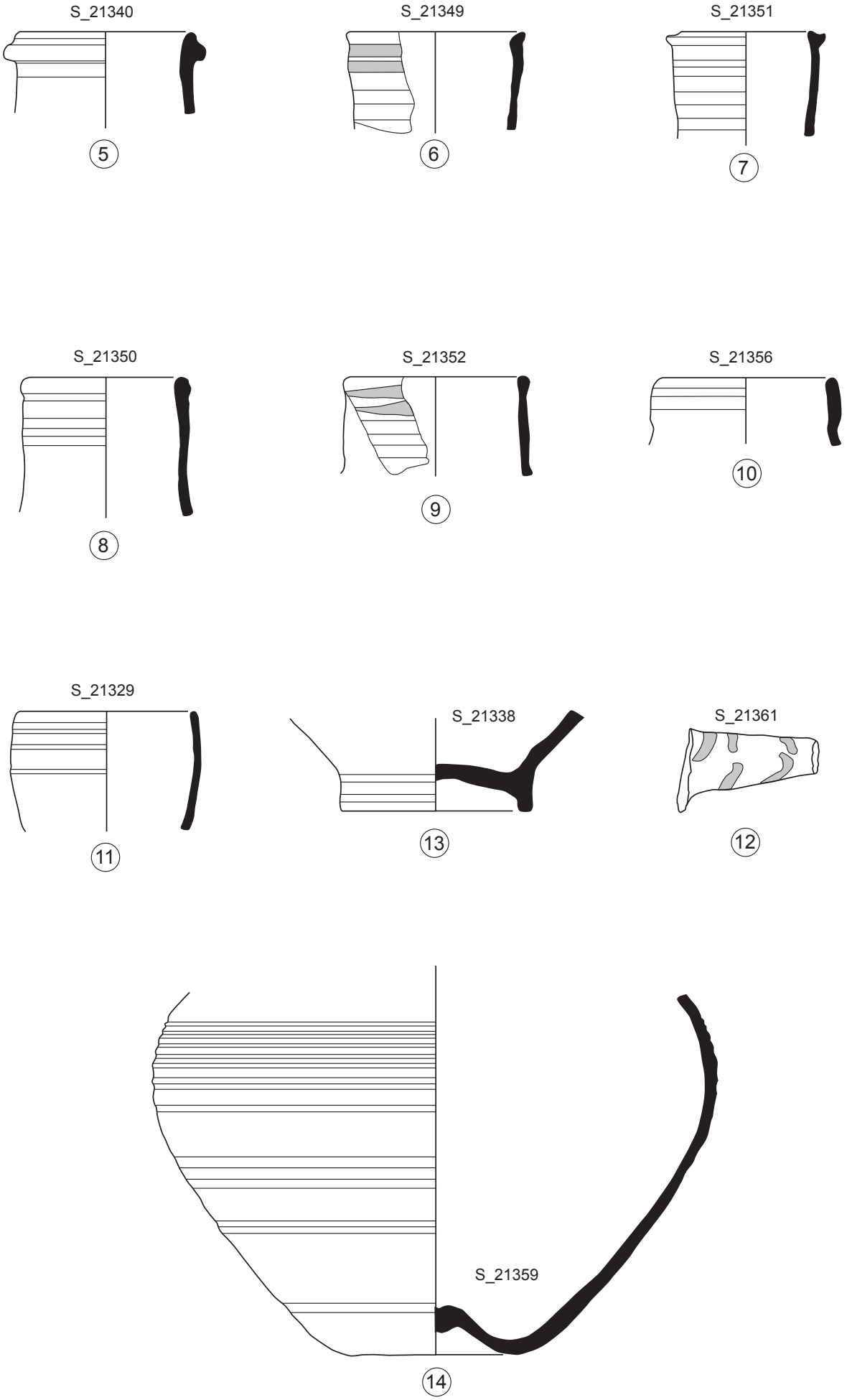




Cistern no. 8. SU402.

0 5 cm

Plate 44



Cistern no. 8. SU402.

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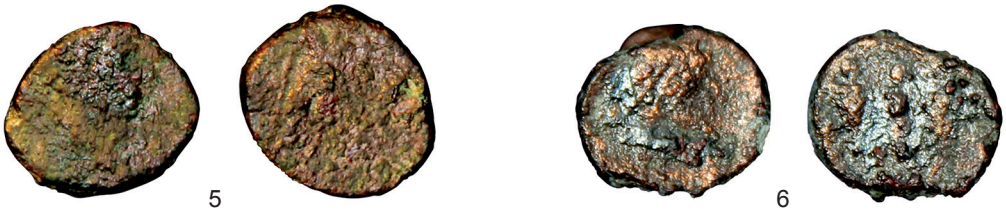

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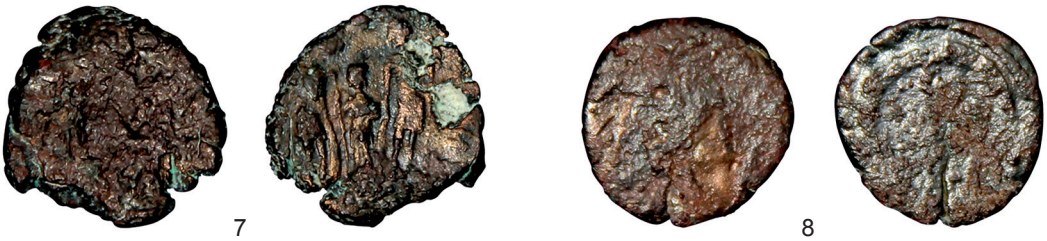

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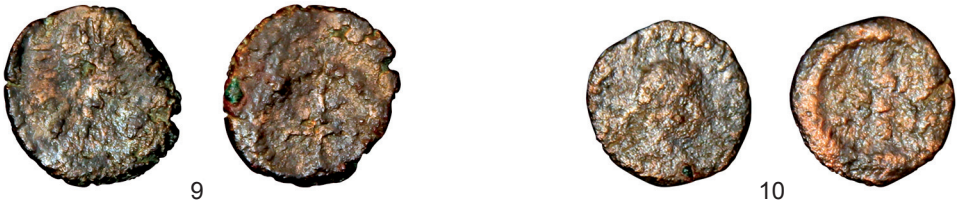

9 10

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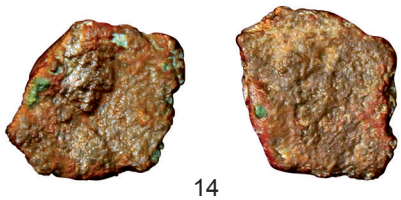
0 1 cm

Plate 46



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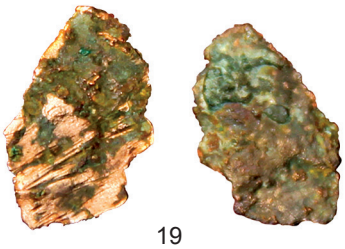

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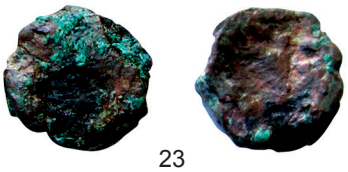

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24

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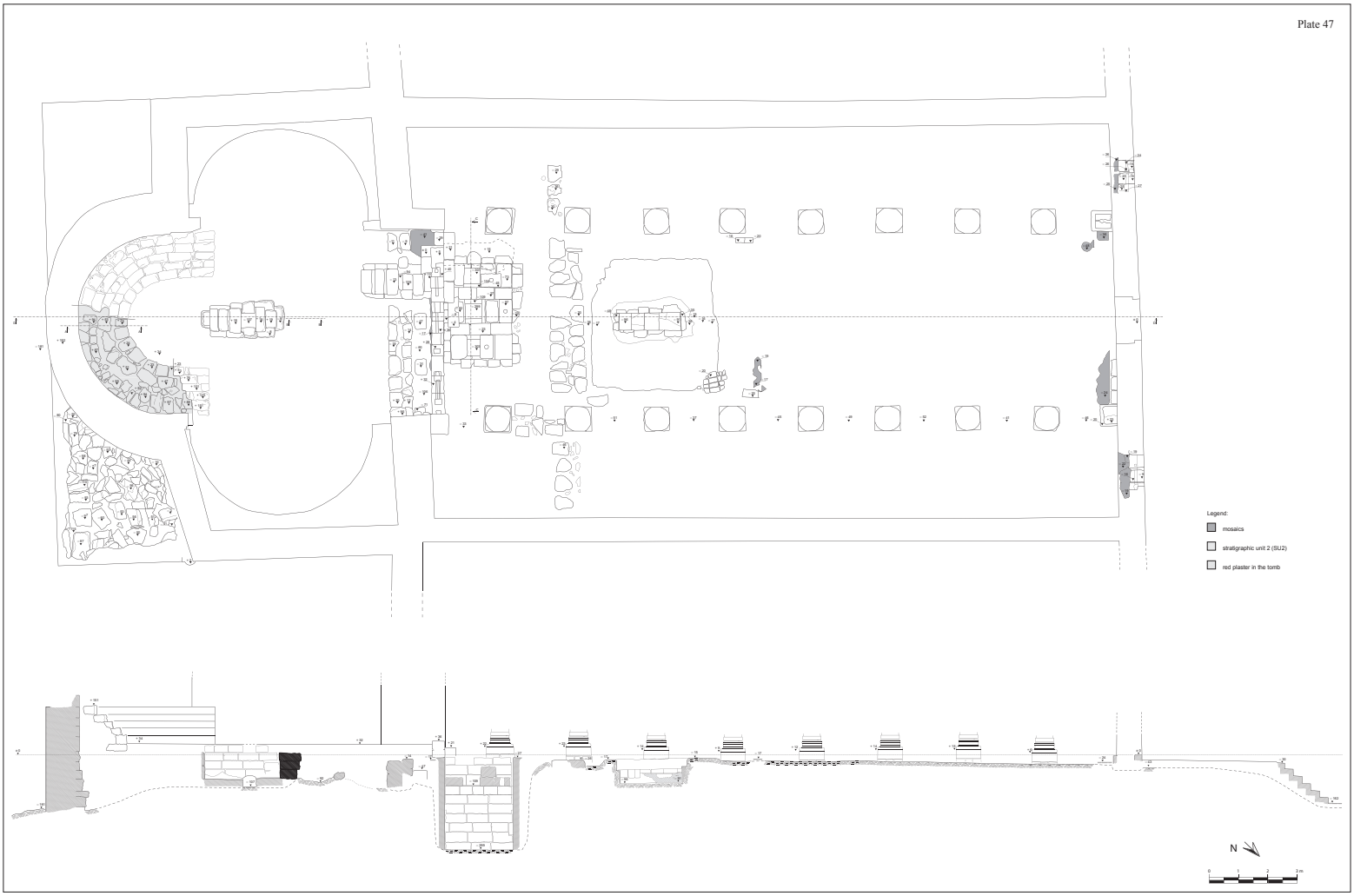

General plan of the excavation in the Basilica (drawing by the author), Cross-section of the Basilica (drawing by E. Alliata).

This book offers new insights into the Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo, one of the most renowned coenobitic monasteries in the Byzantine period in Arabia. Between 2012 and 2014, the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum carried out new archaeological investigations in the southern wing of the monastery and in the church. The excavation in the central nave unearthed an empty tomb adorned with alabaster marble, placed on the highest point of the mountain. Starting from the archaeological data, the author critically reflects on the architectural phases of the basilica, how the monastery was run and its daily life. Special attention is also given to pilgrimages to the monastic shrines beyond the River Jordan and their progressive abandonment.

Davide Bianchi was born in Italy in 1986 and studied Classical and Christian Archaeology in Milan and Jerusalem. After his Master's degree, he worked as an archaeologist on the excavation of the Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo, and at the Terra Sancta Museum in Jerusalem where he actively collaborated on preparing the permanent exhibition on Byzantine monasticism. Since 2017, after his doctorate, he has been Universitätsassistent (Assistant Professor) at the Institute of Classical Archaeology at the University of Vienna.
Research interests: Archaeology of Late Antiquity and Early Christianity of the Near East; Religious and Cultural interactions between Rome and Jerusalem in the Byzantine period; Monasticism in the Holy Land; Relics, Epigraphy and Burial Practices in Sacred Spaces.

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